

LET'S CELEBRATE CHURCH
PSALM 84:1-4,10-12
MATTHEW 10:29-33

Special People!

Where did you come from this morning to get to Church?
What did you do before you left the house this morning?
What did you have for breakfast?
How did you get here?
Who did you come to church with?
What will you be doing this time tomorrow?
What makes you special?

All of that sounds a bit ordinary! We're doing the same as everybody else; we're doing what we do every morning, or on most Sundays! We live in normal houses, beside other normal people; we have ordinary things for breakfast; we come in cars that are the same as everyone else drives, or we share a bus, or we walk, one foot in front of the other, just like other people walk! Tomorrow, we will be at school, work, looking after grandchildren, doing shopping in the same way as everyone else does. So what makes us special? To say all of that sounds as if we're not special at all!

The Bible says we are special people and we are special because God loves us! Everyone is special, then? Well, yes. Every person is special because God loves us and has promised to be with us. Sometimes we are not very lovable people because we get things wrong, but God is patient, forgiving and His love lasts forever. The words from Psalm 84 that Robin read were written by someone who realised that it was special to be loved by God and that it was special to worship God and say "thank you" for His love. He longed to be in the temple, the place where he met with other people and they worshipped God together and they knew that God was there with them. He felt at home there! He knew that it was far better to be there than to be anywhere else and this made him realise just how special he was; he was special because God loved him and was there with him; he worshipped God and said "thank you" to God for His love. We know even more of that love because after Psalm 84, Jesus came, lived and died for us and was raised from the dead and so we know even more what God's love is like. We are God's family because we believe in Jesus and belong to God and are special to Jesus.

Here's a prayer that we're going to say and I hope say together; it shows us something of why we are special:

God be in my head and in my understanding;
God be in my eyes and in my looking;
God be in my mouth and in my speaking;
God be in my heart and in my thinking;
God be at my end and at my departing.
(Book of Hours 1514)

Counting

Can you count? How far can you count? Can you count in another language?
Can you count how many sparrows are in this picture? *There were either 12 or 13 depending on how you saw the picture!*
Can you count the number of hairs on my head?

This is another piece of the Bible that tells us we are special to God. Jesus had challenged His friends to go to do some mission, but they were scared of what might happen to them. He

wanted to tell them that everything would be fine and so he told them about the sparrows and the hairs on their heads.

Sparrows were sold in the markets in Jesus' time; they would either be pets or would be food; now we find them in our hedges! But they were cheapest of all the birds to be sold in the market; they were small and there were lots of them, so they were not worth very much. Nobody was too bothered by them. Jesus says that God cares for the sparrows, even if there are lots of them and they don't seem to be worth very much; God cares for them and looks after them and sort of has a plan for them, all of them, lots of them! God cares for them!

The hairs on your head: I can't believe that nobody was able to count number of hairs on my head, or that nobody even wanted to try! Jesus says that God knows how many there are; God knows how many hairs there are on my head and on your head on everybody's head. Knowing about the hairs on our head is a way of saying that God cares for us; He knows these things about us because He cares for us and loves us and wants us to be blessed by Him.

There are lots of things that make us frightened: going to a new school after the holidays, or to a new class, or to have a new baby, or to get a new job, or to face up to being ill, or all sorts of other things. Here, Jesus helps us to remember that God cares for us; He cares for the sparrows and so how much more will He care for us; He cares for us enough to know how many hairs are on our head. Because He cares for us, we are special people; because He cares for us, He goes with us everywhere we go and helps us to be the right kind of people, people who love Him because He first loves us.

Let's celebrate Church

I have 4 things with me that help us celebrate some good things about church in Juniper Green today:

A Green Lego Brick: this is from our Prayer breakfast two weeks ago; everybody who was there got a brick to take away with them; it was part of a prayer exercise with the question "What would you like to see the church be or do?" and the answer to that question became our prayer for the Church in Juniper Green. It was the first time we did this prayer breakfast and 18 people came to have breakfast and to pray together and this was one part of it, with a green lego brick. Here is something to celebrate about Church; God is at work in us and amongst us and looks for us to pray! There is a tub of lego bricks in the coffee room, take a brick and use it as way of remembering to pray for the church and for our future.

A Tea mug: we drink tea or coffee together. When? after worship today; in the Guild of Friendship meetings and over the summer in the Kinleith; in St Margaret's Court on Thursdays after the service there; at the Soup and Roll lunch, where we not only drink tea, but eat together. There are lots of times when we drink tea together and usually while we're doing that, we talk to each other; we spend time together, getting to know each other better so that we can be stronger together as the church family. Do you know the name of the person sitting next to you or in front of you or behind you or on the other side of the building? Come have tea and find out! We will be a stronger church for that.

A Glue-stick: Kids Church, Messy Church, times to be creative together, to make things, to stick, paint, build, write, decorate together. It can be great fun to make a mess! Maybe some of you want us to use glue sticks on a Sunday morning in Church! Not everybody likes to make a mess, but it is great fun to create something, to transform a digestive biscuit into an Easter garden complete with the stone being rolled away; or to work out the maze; or to decorate mugs. It is all good fun, but it is all designed to help us understand something of a Bible story, whether it be the Easter story, or the lost sheep, or some other story; it is all designed to lead

us to worship, to sing and pray together because we have learned something important about God.

A Bible: at the heart of the church is the story of Jesus; all that we do is based on JC and what he has done for us. We read that story on Sundays and think about what it means; we read that story and talk about it on Wednesdays, when we ask questions of the story so that we know it better and know God better. Without that story and without Jesus, the church is just another group of people who meet together for tea. Jesus is the foundation of Church; Jesus makes us a special people; Jesus gives us something to celebrate and because of Jesus we have so much to celebrate.

Some people think that the Church is out of date, with nothing to give to the world anymore. But I don't believe that. The Church is special because we are people whom God loves; Church is special because we are people for whom Jesus has died and is raised; Church is special because we worship, pray, have fun, eat and drink together, and we share faith together. We don't always get it right: there are still some ways that we think and speak and behave that are wrong and that take away from being special; we need to change these ways and learn to be more and more like Jesus and be the kind of people Jesus wants us to be for the sake of the Church & the Kingdom of God, to be loving and kind and full of compassion for other people. There is lots to celebrate about Church; we are a special people whom God loves, and He promises to be with us today.