

EPHESIANS 4:7-16
MATURITY AND SERVICE

Here are pictures of some signs that you might see on the front of Churches: some are eye-catchingly funny, or at least they are meant to catch the eye! Whether you find them funny is up to you! *God is perfect; man makes mistakes; Some questions cannot be answered by Google; Gambling is a sin; bet you can't give it up!; Jesus is the potter, not Harry.* Notice-boards say a lot about Church and what a Church is like; I'm not quite sure what our notice-board says about us, but the posters are there to make people on the street think as they walk past or go past on the bus or in a car. Here's another notice: I'm not sure if this was found on front of a church but it is certainly repeated on the church website; it belongs to the Church of the Ascension in Baltimore; it's an Episcopal Church and it has the name of the priest in charge: the Rev Carol Bustard-Burnside and a few other people in leadership, but at the very top, the first line reads: *primary ministers – the entire congregation!*

There are 2 ways of thinking about Church: first of all, Church is seen as something to attend; it is something of which I am a member and I attend occasionally to see what I can get from my membership; in our minds, it is similar to the golf club or the bowling club and we are members and we play occasionally to get something for our subscription; otherwise we are spectators sitting on the sidelines. That was the view of Church with which many people of an older generation grew up; so the members of the Church were expected to sit in the pews and listen to the preacher on Sunday and that was it; everything else that Church did was left to the minister and perhaps a few key office-bearers; everyone else simply spectated. That's a caricature, but not by very much. So the Church was something static and settled in its ways.

Secondly, the Church is seen as a body of people belonging to Christ, each one with a part to play in the life of the Church. There are two pictures that shape this view of Church: the first is the picture of the body, which is made up of all kinds of moving parts, each one has a part to play in the smooth and efficient and effective working of my body; my eyes have a job to do, my heart, my lungs, kidneys etc etc all have their jobs to do. Every part functioning well means that my body is strong and healthy and when one part is not functioning, then my body is below par. It is the same for the Church. If we take the notion of the Church as the body of Christ seriously, that means that everyone who is part of the Church has a part to play in the life of the Church, not all having the same part to play, but each to our own; not spectators, but participants, players; ministers – the entire congregation? We'll come back to that later.

The second picture is the story of the two people on the road to Emmaus on Easter Sunday. These two people were walking home to Emmaus, a village outside Jerusalem, having heard something of the stories of Easter and the rumours that Jesus was alive again, but not quite knowing what to believe. As they walked, Jesus fell in beside them and they walked with Jesus along the road and He talked to them: *"what are..." (v17) "Why are you downcast?" "What things about Jesus?"* As they talked to Him, He listened and talked back to them: *"Beginning with..." (v27)* Here are two people, walking home and Jesus walks with them and as they go they listen and learn. If we translate that picture into life and faith and what do we see? We see a picture of listening, learning and walking with Jesus. We are not the finished article in any way, but we are disciples, people who walk with Jesus through life and who learn to be better at the Christian life than we were yesterday and Church is here to help us do that, to help us listen, learn and walk with Jesus.

Paul in Ephesians 4:7-16 wants to strengthen the Church in Ephesus. He uses at least three words to show what this is all about: 'build up'; 'mature'; 'grow' – all are there. Each of these words is a picture word: the first is a house-building word, the building site where the house is taking shape. The second and third are about growing in different ways, the person who is becoming mature, growing up, becoming better, wiser, stronger; or growing in the sense of increasing, making more and more of something, there is more fruit! This is all about a Church that is not static and settled in its ways, but a people who are growing in faith, growing in their understanding of Jesus and the gospel and learning to serve Jesus in new ways. Is that what our Church is like? Are we like that in our Church?

Paul tells us three things about Church here:

1. a Church in which everyone is different and unique we spoke last week about the Church being one, the unity and togetherness of Church and we said then that 'together we are strong' and nothing I will say now takes away any of that; God is One so His Church is One, though we don't always express that as well as we should. Having said that Paul then says: "*But to...*" (v7) The Church may be one, but we are not all the same; we are not all clones of one another or Church leaders. Grace is given to us in different ways and in different measures. We have come to Christian faith in different ways, some have grown up believing, and learned faith from our parents and never stopped believing; some drifted away from that faith and then have come back; others have come to faith later in life as a result of someone's preaching or influence. Each one of us has different gifts or abilities; everyone in this room is a unique coming together of natural talents and gifts and the grace of God and faith to make us the unique individuals that we are today. The Church is the coming together of all of these unique, gifted, talented individuals to celebrate the grace and love of God in worship and to give ourselves to Jesus in service.

2. a Church in which everyone is gifted – Some people are very quick to say that they have no gifts or talents; I don't believe that! Everyone has something they are good at. Paul gives us a list, but not an exhaustive list; these are not the only gifts that God gives. "*It was He...*" (v11) These are all gifts of a similar kind; these are all leadership gifts, gifts of preaching and teaching and bringing God's word to the people. The apostles were the foundation of the Church, twelve of them who had been with Jesus and had witnessed His resurrection; prophets, evangelists, teachers, pastors – all in different ways and in different circumstances called to bring the teaching of Jesus to bear on the lives of the people, leadership gifts. But notice what these leadership gifts are for: "*To prepare...*" (v12a) these gifts are not ends in themselves, but are given to leaders so that the whole people of God can serve, that everyone can find a way of exercising their different gifts.

God still calls people to leadership within His Church. God has called me to be a preacher of the gospel and the pastor of this congregation. God has called those who are elders within this congregation to their leadership jobs too. Our leadership is not an end in itself; if we thought that by becoming Christian leaders we had somehow reached the pinnacle and we are here to be served by and lauded by ordinary church people, then we are very wrong. Christian leadership should be about enabling the whole Church to serve; it should be about giving everyone an opportunity to use your gifts in serving Jesus; it should be about using our gifts to help you use yours. Christian leaders are servants of the servants of God. You also are gifted: what is your best talent? What are you good at? How can that talent be put to good use in the life of the Church? We don't always know what you're good at and yet we'd love to know what gifts and talents we have in our Church.

3. a Church in which everyone serves – *“From Him...”* (v16) here is the ideal Church. Here is the Church with Jesus at its heart, giving life to His people and then round about Jesus all the people are serving each other and every part is doing its work and so the Church is being built up and is growing. The Church in which everyone serves is the Church in which everyone will grow in our faith and will be a growing Church. The Church in which most people are spectators will be static and settled and in our environment, will struggle to survive. That means a change in way we think about Church: it is no longer about something we attend and spectate and about what we get from Church, but it then becomes about what I can give to Church of my time and talents, what I can contribute by way of serving others, how I can make a difference to Church by what I can bring to the table.

Here are three pictures of the building site that was Woodhall Millbrae when the houses were being built down beside the Water of Leith. Which of them, do you think, depicts most keenly the life of our Church? Let me describe them: The first picture is almost bare ground, just at the start of the building work, clearing the ground and laying the foundations. The second is a picture of houses as they are beginning to take shape; you can tell that they are houses, but they are by no means finished yet; the third is of the finished houses, just ready for people to move in, all the mess has gone, everything is neat and tidy. So which of these would be a little picture-parable of our Church?

For me, it can't be the first of these, because our congregation has been here for a long time and we have a tradition of Church that we have to honour. We are not starting from scratch; the church in Juniper Green is not a blank sheet of paper, but is here because many generations of people have served Christ in our community and we have to honour that. It can't be the third either: we are not the finished article; we are not the perfect Church; not every problem is sorted, not every question is answered, our faith is not perfect, there are still doubts, questions, unknowns, issues. It has to be the second: we are a people who are on the way, but not yet done; there is a building site where there are still piles of bricks to be put into place; we are a church where there is still building to be done, where there are still people's questions to answer, where faith still has growing to do, where not every issue is settled.

In our Church Handbook, there is a piece about almost every part of Church life in Juniper Green. If you want to know all that we do, there are some copies in the vestibule. In the introduction to the Handbook, I have said a little about our priorities as Church and there is a little quote there that sums up so much of what we've been saying today. *“The people are not there to help the minister run the Church. The minister is there to help the people be the Church.”* (Anon) A growing Church is a listening Church, listening to Jesus and His Word, listening to the community, listening to one another. A growing Church is a learning Church, learning from Jesus, from one another, learning about faith and life. A growing Church is a serving Church, where we all serve with our gifts and talents, where we all serve Jesus and one another. Ministers of this Church: the entire congregation?