

## Epiphany 3 Luke 4:14-21

As we move through the Church's year season by season, and at this time find ourselves plodding along through the season of Epiphany, so we also move through the calendar seasons. As January gets closer to its conclusion, February is just around the corner, and in our diocese that means annual meetings of parishioners. They are not everyone's favourite, they can be incredibly stressful for clergy and wardens to prepare, and they mark the time when once again leaders are chosen from within the community to take on specific church roles.

As you reflect on own role within the church now or roles you may have held in the past or indeed roles you think you might like to explore in the future, how many of you struggle to feel that you are a perfect fit for what you are asked to do? Put another way, have you felt God's call upon you to function in a particular way within the church community, and indeed within the wider world? If you have, that's wonderful, particularly if you have found a way to fulfil that call, if you haven't, don't worry! We have two powerful excerpts from scripture today which should both inspire and reassure us all, particularly at a time when we are being asked to reflect on personal calling.

Think about the reading we just heard from St Paul's letter to the Church in Corinth and his wonderful metaphor of the body of Christ, a group of people who are as diverse and richly gifted as the individual parts of the human body. By our baptism we are grafted into the body of Christ, we become a part of it, that is why we must take baptism very seriously, and prepare families bringing children for baptism with some idea of what they are requesting. Because whether they acknowledge it or not, if someone is baptised, they are a part of this church family. They don't have to turn up for family gatherings, but that doesn't mean they are not a part of the family. You don't even have to like your fellow family members very much but you're still related to them! So being baptised is a big deal, because we join a family by choice and remain a part of that family going forward.

But what does our family look like? Well it is diverse, far more diverse than our human families. We don't all look alike; we can't tell another member just by sight, there is no physical resemblance. We don't live in the same place, we are from all over the world. Our experience of faith is different and most importantly as we heard in St Paul's passage, our gifts are different, we have different things to offer. And we must be careful not to compare ourselves whether favourably or unfavourably with others in this matter.

That is what Paul means when he says that the foot cannot say it is not a part of the body because it is a hand. Here one very valuable member is putting itself down when looking at the value of another. Equally, Paul says the eye cannot say to the hand, I don't need you, because we none of us know what the other has been called by God into this body to give.

So, we trust that God has called us, by baptism, into this family, this body of Christ. And just like we can't choose our biological family members, neither can we choose our fellow members in the body of Christ. We must trust that God has called us all for a reason, we may never know fully our own reason for being called and it is certain none of us can know everyone else's reason, but we trust that there is one, that every other person has something to offer which is unique to them in this community, whether we are talking about our parish community here or the worldwide Anglican Communion.

That reality applies at all levels, here in this community of the church and the wider community of our town and region, we have a part to play day by day. We may look at others and think we have nothing to offer because they do so much, but that is not so, we are enough. We may think that others aren't doing as much as they could or as well as they could, but that is someone else's part and it must be enough for us as we don't have all their information. We must offer what we have because by the grace of God it will be sufficient.

And it is by God's grace alone, and in God's strength alone that we dare to serve in Christ's name in any capacity. That is what we learn from the gospel reading. Jesus, in his own town and synagogue, the equivalent of a local church community, steps up to leadership. He is not invited to be a leader, he has not studied particularly to be a synagogue teacher, but he knew his role, his call from the Father. Jesus told that community, through the words of the prophet Isaiah that by God's grace he was chosen to be amongst them and to bring a message of good news to all facing difficulties and oppression. Even Jesus didn't begin his ministry with a list of reasons why he would be great at the job, rather he began as he continued, demonstrated to those who would follow him that trust in God is all that is necessary to reach our full potential.

We none of us achieve anything in our own strength, our human nature causes us to stumble and fall. If Jesus is showing us that all he achieved was given by God then we can be sure that there is no other way for us. And this is where both the challenge and reassurance is seated. We are challenged constantly by God to live lives of faith, resisting temptation, trusting in God, leading through service, deepening our discipleship of Christ. Yet we are reassured that as difficult as these challenges seem, our help is in the Lord. We need do nothing in our own strength, but by prayer and obedience to our call we will, by grace, be given the strength, given the words, given the inspiration to do God's will in our place and time using our God given gifts.

As we prepare for our annual meeting of parishioners over the next month may we all prayerfully consider God's call to us this year, it may be different from last year, so that we can each take our place in the body of Christ wherever that may be.