

## Epiphany 2

Yesterday, members of the PCC, along with a couple of the All Saints staff team went on an away day to pray and think and talk about the life of All Saints – who we are, what we do, how we want to grow over the next five+ years.

Many of you will have done something similar over the years, either in a church or work context.

There were Post-its, and break out groups, and lots of caffeine and sandwiches.

It was a really good and thought-provoking day.

It's important to pause from time to time, and reflect together on what has been and what you want to come next.

I had wondered about whether to let things marinade a little before sharing more widely with you as a congregation.

Because there is still plenty to think about, to sit with and consider.

But the readings today really made the decision for me.

*“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.”*

Paul's primary motivation for his letter to the Church in Corinth is to make clear what they are to do as the people of God in that place.

The why – the purpose – of that community – and of ours – is the generosity and the provision of God.

God who creates us, sustains us, who loves and cares for us, and who calls us into that community of fellowship in the first place.

We join that fellowship through baptism, and it is a life of abundance - an abundance shown in the Gospel passage, depicting the very first miracle, as described in John's Gospel.

This was the reading at the wedding between Christian and Kathryn in this church just over a week ago.

I asked the question then: what did Mary expect to happen?

When she told her son: 'they have no more wine', what did she think his response would be?

She shows such confidence in him and what he can do, that she ignores his initial response - 'my hour has not yet come'.

'Do whatever he tells you', she tells the servants.

The result is something beautiful - delicious - generous.

Not boxed, or bargain basement, but Chateau Neuf de pap.

Did Mary expect this of her son?

As she has raised him, and still has within her heart the memories of his birth - the angel, the shepherds, the magi - perhaps she does indeed expect something extraordinary to happen.

And her faith is justified.

The whole community benefits.

Those who are there experience God's generosity.

The disciples believe.

Mary is vindicated.

Is it any wonder that God - who in trinity is community - has given us gifts to be used for the purpose of building up that community?

Gifts that serve others and not just ourselves.

Gifts that come from God, and which reflect the character and the heart of God.

Gifts of wisdom, knowledge yes, but also healing and hospitality.

Every single person here has been given gifts by God.

We are given them not to hoard for ourselves but to share, one with another, so that we all benefit.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

For the common good.

So then: how are we to use all the good gifts we are each given in this place for the common good and the glory of God?

There will be many ways, but we have focussed on three.

The first is worship.

Worship is our instinctive response to God, and we are called to worship God with all of creation.

Our worship here at All Saints is centred around the bread and wine – the hospitality and the generosity of God, to which we bring our gifts and ourselves.

At All Saints we want everyone to feel at home in our services.

We want that worship that enriches our lives – that is inclusive, and accessible, intelligible and beautiful.

We want to sing joyfully and confidently, and if the situation absolutely requires it, accurately (ish)

We want worship that engages our very souls, our senses and our intellect.

We want worship that is genuinely all age – in which every person is welcomed and where their gifts are received, honoured and used.

We want to invite more people to discover God's love, to feel that this is a safe place for them to explore the Christian faith, whether they have been brought up in the faith or whether this is brand new.

For this to happen we want to expand our welcome and hospitality, offer opportunities for study and conversation, and a safe space to ask questions.

We want this to be something in which we all share, for there is always more to learn and explore.

We want to support our community through hospitality – using our buildings, but not just through opening the doors, but rather providing hospitality and help to groups and individuals who either need our help, or who are in their own way seeking to use their gifts for the common good.

This involves our time, building relationships, and trust.

It also involves making sure that our buildings are as accessible and beautiful and fit for purpose as we can make them.

There is plenty more that we want to do, so that All Saints can share the good news of Jesus Christ through worship and hospitality, through learning and social action.

This morning I just wanted to give you a taste of what we have been discussing.

This is only the first step.

We need to plan carefully, so that we don't try to make everything happen at once.

We need to identify what resources we need to make things happen.

So much good is already happening.

We want this to continue and to grow even more.

We will do this.

Because we have all been given gifts.

And if we combine them, there is much that we can do that will bring joy to God, and build up the common good.

We will do this.

Because God is God, and God is good.