

## **Worship for everyone 25/08/24 – The church**

‘Today you may be a teacher, a social worker, carer, stage manager, orchestrator, administrator, visitor experience guide, counsellor, event planner’. ..... The list continues after that. It is actually a quote from a job advert, I’ll tell you what job later but the breadth of previous experience they thought relevant struck me as particularly enlightening in respect of the variety of people who make up the church.

In our journey through the creed we have reached the point when we consider the church. ‘We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church’.

So lets quickly get away from the idea of the word catholic in the creed referring to the Roman Catholic church. In the credal context, it simply means the whole so the creed is referring to the whole church – including all Christians wherever they are in the world. Easy to forget that in this country we form only a small part of the whole.

It is of course easy to see the church as our church, one of the buildings within our own parish. We talk of going to church when we are coming here. But we are the church, those of us who are in this building now, or at Christ the King, who earlier were at St Johns, who were here on Thursday or at messy Church last Saturday. The buildings are in reality only gathering places for the people who constitute the church.

The whole church? Well a quick walk through Shirley will show you a number of Christian churches, and yes we do do things slightly differently from each other on a Sunday morning but when we get together we rarely discuss those differences but focus on the similarities. We all believe in God whose Son Jesus was crucified, and rose from the dead on the third day, and whose Spirit guides our actions and our words.

It is together this parish’s different congregations, the other churches in Shirley, the other churches across the country and the world that we make the whole church. And don’t forget those Christians who have gone before. Some of them are feted as saints, others memorialised in marble for their holiness or generosity, but mostly they have passed with no trace centuries ago. They are all part of the spiritual union of the church both living and dead.

What does being part of that body mean for us? That largely depends on what we decide it will mean.

It is possible to go around busy telling everyone of our virtuous behaviour, making out that we are somehow better than others because we do church. We shouldn’t want to be coy about our church involvement – if it is important to us then we would not expect to hide it from people. But we don’t need to self promote. Think of all the times in the gospels when Jesus tells people not to share with others how they came to be healed.

Or we can get bogged down with seeing ourselves as sinful and unworthy that we are unable to raise our heads high enough to see the rest of the world. We do expect to

consider our past actions, to acknowledge those times when our thoughts and deeds did not meet with the standards we expect, but no one, especially Jesus, wants us to carry these things as heavy burdens for ever. Our God is a forgiving God, who loves us and wants only the best for us.

We, all of us here, are the body of the church. It is up to us to make church happen. Well we do need people to mow the grass and make after church coffee, but so does a community centre. We also need people to contribute to worship, to lead the intercessions, the readings, people who pray for the people for the parish during the week, who phone to check when we are not where we usually are. People with unorthodox ideas for children's activities, and who raise our awareness of things outside of our immediate environment.

Everyone has a role within our church community and it is not always what we expect. Don't forget this is a safe space to try the things you don't think you can do. There are plenty of people who have told me they could not act in the drama when we invite the children to the journeys at easter and Christmas, and then prove themselves wrong. Yes. It takes a jump into the untried but there is no shortage of people holding the blanket to catch us when it doesn't quite work out.

St Paul reminds us that it is our duty to be happy with those who are happy and to weep with those who weep. The church is a place of joy, of sorrow, of companionship, of escape, of worship and of service. For this to happen we all need to play our part in the whole, to share our skills, to try new things, to be tolerant and to be considerate.

That quotation at the beginning was from an advert for a vergger at St Paul's cathedral and I wanted to share it because it seems to describe so brilliantly the breadth of individuals who can make up the body of the church. It finishes, 'we seek for our verggers to be as diverse in experience and life as the visitors and worshippers we welcome'. That feels like the gold standard for church membership.