

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Hello, it is very nice to see you all this morning. Thank you for coming. It seems a long time in the waiting, but we have finally managed to come together. Thank you for your kindness and warm welcome over the past few weeks. You have made us feel very welcome indeed. But why have I come to this church? Apart from the fact that you are all so splendid and bake such fine cakes?

Well, one especially quiet day in heaven, God went to St Peter and told him that he felt in need of a holiday and commissioned Peter to look around for a package deal. A few days later St Peter reported back that he had found a perfect location; "the moon".

God replied "I couldn't possibly go there; there's no atmosphere!"

St Peter, a little perplexed said to God that he had also found a second option, 'Earth'.

God responded, "Well I'm not going there. The last time I went there, I met a nice Jewish girl and they are still talking about it!"

Well, of course we are still talking about it and it is our job to ensure that people continue talking about it in this place for many centuries to come. That, I think, is principally why I am here! Like the many commendable parish priest's before me, I am here to work with each of you in laying foundations and to build upon all that has gone before so that Christ's legacy may continue in this place long into the future.

In our Gospel reading today we hear of St John the Baptist recognising the authenticity of Jesus. And having done so, he is forced to tell others of this revelation. John sees in Jesus not just the one chosen by God, but God Himself. God in human form. This is called the Incarnation, because in the person of Christ we see both humanity and divinity in perfect union. God is Jesus and Jesus is God - God incarnate. Jesus is the Lamb of God; and takes away the sins of the world. The Lamb of God who offers a route back to the Father. All we are required to do is believe in Him, obey Him, follow Him, love Him.

St Andrew in today's Gospel shows us more, because recognising Jesus comes at a price. As Andrew recognised only too well, in our heart of hearts it is our belief in who Jesus really is that compels us to follow Him and tell others about the wonderful thing we have found. So it is that Andrew not only follows Jesus but also tells His brother, Simon Peter, that he has found the 'Messiah'. The term he chooses is extremely important. To say that he has found the 'Messiah' is to say that in Jesus, Andrew not only sees an important moral teacher, but the fount of all goodness. He is not just some first century doctor, but the source of all healing. Jesus is the miracle cure for a terminally ill world.

The unwell only have to touch him to be healed. The poor only have to believe in Him to become rich. The evil only have to see him to be shamed into goodness. There is no doubt that Christ is the divine answer to a very human problem, but how did he intend for things to pan out after His resurrection? Well like all good strategists He provided evidence of a plan A and a plan B.

Plan A was the Church. It is clear from the way Jesus chose his Apostles, sanctioned them and sent them out to make more disciples, that it was absolutely His intention to form a physical church, lead by chosen and ordained

individuals and made up of real people. It is also clear that He expected this Church to spend all its energies growing and increasing in number. The genius of this first plan was that it would not rely on any individual alone, but the power of Christ's Spirit being given to the many. This Church would always be strong so long as it called upon and stayed true to His Spirit – ever present in the Church's words, its actions and the hearts of its people. And if all this failed then He would resort to plan B.

And Plan B was even more ingenious. Plan B was simply to continue with Plan A. In all the scriptural and historical evidence, Christ offers us no alternative than an ordered Church of diverse members spreading the Good News and driven by His Spirit. This is ingenious, simply because it gives us no easy way out. Christ knows our human nature too well and so to save us from our own tendencies, He gives us just one option – membership of the Church.

As the body chosen to live out the legacy of Christ in every age and to reveal His Spirit by His grace, the Church body becomes an extension of our Lord's incarnation. We the church in this age are simply called to continue the work He began, sanctifying the world through our presence. This places a huge burden upon our shoulders because in order to sanctify the world we need to live both individually and corporately as if we believe we can; portraying those same traits that we see in the life of our Lord. If we are to truly sanctify our world then we must be open to the world. In the same way that Andrew could see in Jesus the fount of all goodness, we need to make people see the Church as a place of goodness. Just as people could touch Jesus and be healed, people need to feel that they can touch us to reach Him. Just as the poor only had to believe in Him to become rich, we need to be able to give the poor something to believe in.

In our New Testament reading, St Paul is talking to the Church in Corinth which is being called to a new beginning. Just like them, so are we. The future here is very bright indeed. St Mary Magdalene's has huge potential, but potential needs to be realised. We can only hope to achieve all that God has in store for us if we are united in that same Spirit which abounds in our hearts and drives us on. To do so, each of us must not be shy in giving what we can to increase God's mission to our village. Time, talents, money: each one of us are able to give so much. Don't leave to the few to do all the work of the many; we are all called to live as Christ lives, giving all we are able to. We are all called to live in His Spirit as one body; an extension of His body.

The efforts of people in this parish have been remarkable over the past few years. We really do have some exiting things to build on. And build on them together – we must!

So if you have any gifts you would like to offer or any ideas for moving us forward or for making our church richer, more open, more united, more Christ-like, let us know. Isn't this exciting stuff? Because as St Paul reminds us: "God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord".

Can there be anything more marvellous? Apart from your baking, that is?

Amen