

How many Anglicans does it take to change a lightbulb? Ten – one to change the bulb, four to argue about how to change the bulb and five to comment on how much better the old bulb was even though it no longer worked.

There is a saying about Anglicanism, ask ten Anglicans a question and you will get thirteen different answers.

Few of us can have failed to notice that in recent months and years, there have been global discussions within our blessed Anglican church that have not been easy. Discussions about gender, sexuality and openness and inclusion more generally. Some of these discussions have cut right to the centre of what it means to be an Anglican, and made us question our Anglican devotional core. But as annoying and disjointed as Anglicanism can seem from the outside, the fact that it can debate these things openly and that it can have a whole array of views represented, is, in my opinion, a great strength. It is difficult, partly because it is a very counter-cultural position to take, but it makes me very proud indeed to be an Anglican. The world always takes such a firm black and white stance over such issues and then it demands that everyone else conform, indeed most other church denominations do the same, but Anglicanism tries its best to be completely open to all perspectives, and recognises the greater wisdom that can be gained from listening to and attempting to understand all sides of a debate. As such, Anglican churches today span the whole plethora of mainstream Christian belief. This is diversity in action and our blessed Anglican church is the only place in the world where you will find such diversity in such completeness. It doesn't matter what gender you are, who you love, what colour your skin, what social demographic you come from, how poor you are or how rich and it doesn't matter what lies in your history, somewhere locally there will be an Anglican church where you will feel welcome and included. Indeed, along this vein, over these last three years, we have made many changes at Geddington and Weekley in order to try and make these churches as welcoming and inclusive as possible. It is our belief that difference does not cause division, unless we allow it too. Far from it, somewhere in the middle of all this diversity, God is speaking to us!

Of course, the media love to play this all up and portray it as deep division, because it generates so much controversy and sells papers and air time. But our diversity is by far and away our most treasured asset. It means that we are all regularly challenged to rethink our position on important issues over and over again, and as we do so we develop our own personal integrity in faith – proper integrity that is formed by thinking about things openly and thoroughly.

Today we celebrate the feast of St Luke. St Luke is attributed to have written Luke's Gospel account of Jesus' life and the Book of Acts which records the events surrounding the growth of the Early Church. Luke is also written about in some of the Letters of the New Testament. Both the Gospel of St Luke and the Book of Acts are written in a style of historical narrative that betrays the author's educated background. Luke is thought to have been a physician and writes in a way that is gentle and open. What all these accounts reveal is a highly intelligent person who recognises the limits to his own abilities. Luke comes to realise that the kind of physical healing he can bring can only go so far and in order for individuals and society as a whole to be properly healed, they need to come to know the love of God and to live in tune with the example Jesus lays down. Luke seems concerned with providing the Church with accurate historical evidence concerning Jesus and the Early Church so that it can continue to grow in every location as the place where people can come together regularly to encounter God, to think about Jesus and to change their lives for the better. As a thoughtful and thorough person, I like to think that Luke himself will have been an Anglican.

But just like Anglicanism today, Luke is writing to an audience that is doing its best to respond to some rather hostile surroundings. The reference in today's reading of lambs being sent out amongst wolves, is clearly directed at the situation the Early Church found itself in – trying to spread the good news of Jesus to a society that ridiculed it and would rip it apart and use it to feed its own insatiable appetite for self-destruction. But God had other plans. Indeed, he has other plans. Even though the labourers are few, the harvest is plentiful and so as the book of Acts tells us, despite every attempt from society to suppress and destroy it, the Early Church grows. Even the murder and martyrdom of the early apostles, cannot stop the healing power of God succeeding. The same continues to be true today.

Nonetheless, being a growing church of such diversity can be a challenge. It is a little like parenting. I remember when Sarah and I first had Jasmine, our daughter. As she grew we found ourselves looking for good examples of how to parent a very active toddler. Should we follow our own parents' examples or should we follow some of the plethora of parenting books on sale in any boo shop? If you put parenting into a book search on Amazon, you will find thousands of results. For example, 'Positive Parenting' seems to tell you how to parent and never actually tell your child off – no good for me, I'm far too grumpy for that! Then there's one called 'Calmer Parenting', which seems to be about how to parent without actually ever doing anything at all. Whilst 'How to parent the Danish way', I can only imagine involves rewarding your child's behaviour with sticky pastries filled with

bacon slices whilst wearing a Viking's helmet. But my favourite by far is – 'Hurrah for Gin: A book for perfectly imperfect parents'. Partly because I am fond of an occasional Gin and secondly because I now realize every parent is imperfect.

But it can be very unnerving being a parent in today's world. There is so much expectation and pressure. In the past, there seemed to be an expected way to parent. But over the past thirty years, with the uncovering of so many appalling abuses of the past, old models that were once taken for granted are now rightly being questioned and queried. But this has made parenting so much more difficult, without there being a common model to follow.

As Jasmine began to grow into a toddler, I remember feeling completely confused about how I was meant to parent her. Some of the older generation seemed to be telling me that I needed to be strict, set boundaries and 'bring her up right'. But, most of my generation seemed to be appalled every time I tried to provide clear boundaries. My own parents were the worst and most inconsistent in their criticism – one-minute complimenting on how good it was that Jasmine had clear boundaries and the next complaining every time I told her off – as though there was no correlation between the two. In the end, we just had to find our own way and hope and pray that other people would support us in whatever parenting style we followed, and that they would show trust us that we were just trying to do our best, even when we got it wrong.

My point is, that the Anglican church is a little like that parent. What is being asked of it has changed massively over the decades and it has to try and respond. But there are so many opinions about what it should think and do and say and be, that it doesn't always make for plain sailing. But it is my belief that much of the fun is in the ride, the journey it takes us on as we ponder, explore and delve deeper into what God might be asking of us and calling us to. Different local churches will therefore respond in different ways, but we should trust that they are simply trying not to lose their central focus upon what they are there to do – to bring people to know Jesus better through word and sacrament. Encouraging a regular pattern of encounter with God. Just like St Luke recognised, our churches are here to offer a long-term engagement with the Jesus who heals more than just our bodies. Jesus shows us the way to live and guides us back to the Father if we are true to him. If we can try and be forgiving, understanding and generous, to those with whom we disagree, then it can be a positive and enriching experience for all. Sometimes difference of opinion can make us feel frustrated or unsettled, but as we work these things through, so we become

stronger. Stronger individually in our own faith and stronger together as a faithful community. Amen.