

As you might be aware, because we started last week,
we are at the moment following sermon themes
that the diocese have invited all churches to follow –
they look at five particular marks of growth –
different areas of our life together which
it would be fair enough to assume that,
as the people of God, we are growing – they are:
Christlikeness, Commitment, Partnership,
Influence and Numbers.
Now some of those will need more explanation –
what they are about might not be obvious,
but last week was Christlikeness and this week is Commitment.

at the start I want to ask you this question:
when I say – I'm going to talk about commitment today –
how do you feel?
Do you get a sinking feeling, like you're about to be got at,
do you feel weary that you're 'doing all you can already'?
or perhaps you don't regard the idea of commitment in those ways.

Commitment is at the heart of the nature of God.
The persons of the Trinity are in a committed relationship
of love with each other.
God shows commitment to us ... in creating us ...
in sending Christ ... in leaving the Spirit to be with us.
And response God calls us to live committed lives:
committed in our relationship with God and with others.

Our foundational relationship in life should be with God.
And nothing should get in the way of that.
Seek first the kingdom,
"love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, strength".

And we are also called by Christ to committed relationship with one another.
So the church is called to be a community
of committed relationships,
as we learn to love, care and support each other.

We have heard 3 portions of scripture this morning,
so I want to build up a 3 fold picture of commitment -
something that is perhaps a little less dry than what I've just said,
something that might enliven us in our life with God,
rather than making commitment feel heavy and burdensome

First of all the Isaiah passage which is inviting exiles
living outside of Judah to uproot themselves,
move to a land their generation has never known,
and reclaim their ancestral home.

And the image used is that of a great banquet
which gives a picture not only of the promise of the land's fertility
but also the spiritual richness of life before God.

Come to the water; come to the banquet; come buy without money.
In other words, don't take what has value and waste it on nothing.

They have money,
but they have been spending it on the wrong things.
But the call is:
Don't settle for what doesn't feed; take only what is good.

What has this to do with commitment –
well it speaks of the one who is committed to us
and the one to whom we are to be committed.
Our God is a God of abundance, of lavishness.
And that God invites to us to come –
to participate to share in the richness of God's table.
And at a spiritual level
it asks us to look at the choices that we make –
it is an invitation to make healthy choices for our own soul,
to choose what gives life,
rather than what does not nourish,
and to meet our gracious and giving God in that place.

Do you see your relationship with God
as an invitation to a banquet?
As an invitation to drink refreshing water and
eat good food as an honoured guest?

Hold that thought ...

The Romans passage ...
if you've got that picture of the banquet,
of being God's honoured and invited guest in your head,
well I might be about to blow it. –
Paul's words – present your bodies as a living sacrifice ...
be transformed by the renewing of your mind...

We're back to hard slog,
we're back to trying and failing to live up to a standard –
and living sacrifice, that doesn't sound like very much fun ...

When we think of sacrifice,
we think of slaughtered animals
or perhaps of giving to our own hardship or detriment.
But a sacrifice actually is about the act of
setting something apart for a purpose and declaring it holy
and we are to be a living sacrifice –

to live as those who are holy, in order to help other things –
our society, our work places, our neighbourhoods, our homes,
to be holy too.

Very often after the Eucharist we say the prayer together
“through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice, send us out ...”
note it's the same as Paul says here in Romans –
and note it's plural souls and bodies, single living sacrifice.
We are together committed to Christ –
In such a way that we are one
and we reaffirm that commitment each time
we share bread and wine together –
together we are Christ's body – made holy –
in and for the world.

Commitment is about participation in the body –
the greatest act of worship we can offer God
is to be a body of Christ's people in which the
gifts of each are valued,
and each of us uses our gifts on behalf of the body as a whole,
it is about what we put in,
not what we want to get out of it:
this is worship;
this is a sacrifice that is alive, holy and acceptable to God.

So we're building this picture –
we've got the banquet of Isaiah, and the holy body of Romans.
What about that Matthew passage?

It's another invitation.
Jesus says do not worry,
in this day and age, as in any age, that can be a tricky one,
For many of us, do not worry
might not mean about physical necessities of life
like food and clothes

it might mean emotional and spiritual –
eg feeling valued, not feeling lonely, feeling good about ourselves
or having our need to be needed satisfied

but, Jesus says, seek God's righteousness and God's kingdom
in the here and now –
each time you are inclined to worry –
turn that energy into seeking God right there and then.
We can read it in a way that gives reassurance –
compare yourself with the birds and the lilies
and know God will look after you,
God will sort it all out in the end.

But we need also to hear the invitation in it.
Not worrying is not about 'making do' or stoically 'putting up with'
while we wait for God to sort everything out.
It is an invitation actively to seek
the kingdom of God and God's righteousness.
To take the risk to seek our God of creation, of abundance,
in who's image we are made.
To get involved with the God who calls us to participate
in the very act of redemption of creation.

It is an invitation to forget ourselves and our own needs –
if Christianity is anything it's a call out of self-centredness –
to God-centredness
our commitment is to be to seeking God's kingdom
not to getting our own needs met.

And the joy is that when we do that we find
our real, deep needs satisfied as we seek and
participate in God's kingdom

Commitment in a nutshell is about saying yes to God's invitation
and then acting on that invitation
– saying yes to bringing what you have to the party
and sharing it with others –
yes to seeking out where God is a work and
getting stuck in there – as Christ's co-worker.

So how are we doing –
how are you doing at seeking God's kingdom
and given that we're talking about commitment
as a mark of growth,
how do we measure commitment anyway?

Individually it might be a moment to think about motivation:
Even most basically: why do you come to church?

Think about your commitment to God
and your commitment to church – where do they overlap –
where do they clash perhaps?

Or maybe there is something you need to do
to mark your commitment?
Depending where you're at it might be baptism
or confirmation,
or joining the next Alpha course,
maybe you simply need to mark it between you and God
as you receive communion today,
or perhaps by joining the electoral roll

or starting to give a regular planned amount
or sharing some of those gifts that God has given you
with others – whether that be in church or away from church
in your work or home life

How do you feel about church?

When you think about what the church “should be doing”

(Vision Process) –

do you think in terms of “they should” or “we should” –

how we talk about something (especially when we are unhappy)

is a pretty good indicator of how we feel about it –

and using ‘we’ rather than ‘they’ implies commitment –

whether we’re happy with what we’re committed to or not

how we are as a body isn’t up to one person,

or a group of people – it’s up to us all, we are all invited.

If I ask the same question as I did at the start?

Think about your commitment to the kingdom of God –

what is your predominant feeling or thought?

Do you see it as a burden

Do you see your commitment in terms of a transaction

whether with God or with others,

or do you see it as saying yes to God’s invitation

to be part of the banquet, the holy body, the kingdom of God.