

Dear Friends,

Do you know what makes a church work well? We may have all sorts of answers to that question but I was very struck by some words from Paul's letter to the Romans which we read in church recently.

*Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If someone's gift is prophesying, let them use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let them serve; if it is teaching, let them teach; if it is encouraging, let them encourage; if it is in generosity, let them be generous; if it is in leadership, let them lead diligently; if it is in showing mercy, let them do it cheerfully. (Romans 12.3-8)*

Do you know what gifts God has given you? Paul makes the assumption that everyone in a church community has something to contribute to the greater good and that, however many or few gifts we have, we should use them. Paul lists some of these gifts and it is extraordinarily wide ranging: prophecy; service, teaching, giving encouragement, generosity, leadership and being merciful or kind. It is a wide range of gifts for a wide range of people: gifts both overtly religious (prophecy) but also practical and simple, like being kind or generous.

Now there is a natural reticence with most of us about putting ourselves forward or admitting that we may have been given gifts by God. And humility is a great virtue. But the point about gifts is that they have been given. If God has given you a gift; if God has given you opportunities to be kind or generous, to teach or to encourage, then admitting to that isn't conceited. If you had been given a present for Christmas and when asked about this you had said 'nothing really', I might suspect you of ingratitude or absent mindedness!

Paul is assuming that every single Christian has been given gifts, yes, even you... and he is urging us to use those gifts. But maybe you don't really know what those gifts are. If you don't know, how might you be able to find out? Pray about it. Talk to someone who knows you well. Come and have a chat and we can see where your strengths and natural interests lie. It is often precisely there that we find the gifts God has given us for the good of his church. If our churches are to grow and flourish we need everyone to use their gifts, not just a handful of people. And of course, that may mean that the handful needs to help others identify and use their gifts. So let's find out what your gifts are.

There are many opportunities in our parish to serve God, the church and our local community. If we believe that all Christians have been given gifts for the good of all, then let's be really determined to discover those gifts and encourage one another in their use. As we do this so our faith will develop, our churches will be strengthened and God's Kingdom will grow.

With love,

Louise.