

Epiphany 3 2014

Today's Gospel reading follows the description of Jesus being tempted in the desert, which we will hear later in the year. Was he waiting for a signal? The Gospels agree that he didn't begin to announce the Kingdom until he heard that John had been arrested. He had fought with the powers of darkness and had overcome, now one of their earthly number had attacked the Baptist. Perhaps Jesus could wait no longer, it was time for the great light to shine.

He went to Galilee, to the town of Capernaum to live and start his work. If any of you have been to Capernaum it has remarkably well preserved archaeology. Galilee was regarded as Gentile country and it was from here that he picked his first followers. Followers who just gave up family and livelihoods, with no promise of rewards or glory. These fishermen became part of something new without knowing what it was or where it was going to lead.

This is the start of the new community, a new family. The light is beginning to shine, the work is starting. Like any family there will be problems, arguments about who will be closest to Jesus, who will be greatest, and once they are on their own, arguments about theology and power.

Paul is addressing problems in the Christian community in Corinth and several of us heard a very powerful sermon preached last Sunday for the week of Christian unity by Pastor Michel on this passage.

Paul's call for unity could be seen as a call for uniformity but this is not the same thing at all. Unity in faith is not the

same as uniformity of thought and practice. Problems of this sort, including alliances with different leaders and groups feeling they have the 'right' way to follow Christ didn't cease at Corinth and carry on to the present day.

So we can't afford to feel superior to the infant church, we need to work at our own feelings of 'rightness' and criticism of other ways of worshipping the one God. We are united in Christ and by Christ.

Paul knows that a competitive instinct is present in humans, acknowledged or not, this basic instinct leads us to define our own value by denying or deriding someone else's. We disagree over who has the best version of the gospel, the right interpretation, the best ways to worship, the right way to attract new Christians.

We are reminded of all our different gifts by Paul, (1Cor12) and that we are not all alike, that we all have different things to offer to other Christians and the church as a whole, the gifts are for the common good. "There are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all men." We have to learn to live with diversity, to see it positively as work towards fulfilling the great commission. Because as Paul says "The body is a unit though it is made up of different parts".

We all know this, we have heard these readings many times. How difficult we find it to put into practice. And that is not just us here today, its Christians everywhere. There seems to be a sense of safety in being alike, or

perhaps its that common understanding that unites groups of all kinds from bikers to brownies.

Jesus says; love the Lord your God and love your neighbour as yourself. Nothing about only if they don't wave their hands in the air when they sing, or if they like incense. Most of the differences between Christians are as slight in the real sense as the colour of our hair or eyes.

I know there are some issues that go much deeper than that, nothing is as simplistic as it appears I am saying. However, if we love God and love our neighbours we are being Christians in the most basic sense and if we aim to help others know and love God that is what is expected of us.

Perhaps we can try even harder not to be like the Christians of Corinth, not fighting about which group we belong to but uniting in fighting for God, uniting in being the body of Christ who all share one bread.