

“A Word to St. Philip’s”

Sunday 20 September 2009

David Commander

Readings:

Acts 9:32-42

John 14:8-27

What a great day! What a day to be joyful!

Rob and Sarah have brought Zoe and James; Steve and Michelle have brought Ben and Sam; plus family and God parents, to see their children baptised. I don't know how big Zoe & James' and Ben & Sam's extended families are; but they're just about to get much, much bigger!

At the end of the Baptism service, we, the whole church will say to them, "We welcome you into the fellowship of faith; we are children of the same heavenly Father; we welcome you." That means that we are all brothers and sisters. And we've already said to them that, with God's help, we will uphold them (that means help them) in their new life in Christ.

They are about to enter into this big church family. And I pray that we will be a real joy and a big help for them. A joy for them, because they now have all of us as older, experienced brothers and sisters in Christ. And also a joy for us; because we also have new, young, enthusiastic brothers and sisters. But also a help for them; for if they have any questions, or need any help, then this part of their church family have said that they will help.

Each one of us here, who has responded when the youngsters were presented, has a responsibility. That responsibility is not just to our blood relatives, but to all members of the church family. This is not just a one-off event, the day of baptism for these youngsters; we've said our bit; now we can forget it. We now have new members of the family and we are here to help, to guide, to teach and also to learn.

That is exactly how the early Church was. It was a big family; looking after one another. With the first disciples, we can think of them as a newly formed family group, with Jesus leading the family. (Perhaps slightly dysfunctional at times, but a family none the less!) We have so much written about all the things that Jesus did in his life, it is hard at times to think that he was killed at only about 33 years of age. And that his actual ministry, his work, was only for about 3 years. But in that time he did some amazing things. He also told his family of disciples that he had to "go away". But he reassured them that he wouldn't leave them on their own. Brian read in verse 16, "*I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.*" And in verse 26, "*But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*" We might think that Jesus did amazing things. But he gave the disciples the power to do the same things as he did! Jesus told the disciples, "*I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things!*" Wow. The disciples?! How? Through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are many stories in the Bible of the disciples healing people. In the reading from Acts, Peter healed Aeneas – a man who had been paralysed for eight years. "*Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up.*" *Immediately Aeneas got up.* (v.34) And they didn't stop at just healing, Peter brought Tabitha back to life! It wasn't just Jesus that raised people from the

dead. How did Peter, a disciple, do that? Verse 40: *"Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed..... Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up.""*

He got down on his knees and prayed!

We are disciples of Jesus. Jesus left the Holy Spirit with his disciples; he has left the Holy Spirit with us. We might think that Jesus did amazing things. But he has given us the power to do the same things as he did! We have the power through the Holy Spirit! I don't know about you, but I find that so hard to believe - but it's truly, truly exciting!

But there were also times when the disciples failed to heal people, and Jesus had to step in and do the job. In Mark's gospel (9:18) *a man brought his possessed son to Jesus; "I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."* When the disciples asked Jesus why they couldn't do it, Jesus responded, *"This kind can come out only by prayer."*

We are told so many times in the Bible that "Jesus went off early in the morning," or, "Jesus went up a mountain" to pray. If it was something that Jesus had to do regularly, it's obviously very important. And if it's something that Jesus needed to do, then how much more do we need to do it?!

I cannot believe that I have come to the end of my eight weeks with you here. Helen and I have felt truly welcome and blessed by everyone here. You will remain in our prayers for a long time. You are a wonderful church family, and I thank our God that he brought me to your church to learn from you. Thank you. You have so many good things happening here. But there is a human trait that makes us all not seem to notice or appreciate all that we have when it's right under our noses, or "just there" whenever we look.

- At St.Philip's there are many, many helpful and generous people in this church family. People leading allsorts of groups and activities; nursery groups, children's groups, craft groups, and active Home Groups. Very important. Running "Start" courses. All these need people to come forward and give freely of their time and talents, and you do. God has blessed you.
- You have a fantastic church building. It's spacious; it's flexible; there are many rooms and many facilities. Yes, there's the occasional leak! But it's a building and a resource that many would be envious of.
- You've got Readers, a new Evangelist, another Reader in training. Children's Groups leaders. Hard working Church Wardens and a large PCC. Someone who signs at services. God has blessed you.
- You have great worship and a strong music group to lead the worship. The worship is relaxed, but it's joyful and it's spiritual. God has blessed you.
- And St.Philip's is a praying church. Every event I have been to has involved prayer. Before the start of the service, the worship team pray together. Before every meeting, there is prayer. That's as it should be, but let me tell you, that doesn't always happen everywhere.
- And in Brian and Karen you have a great partnership to lead the ministry, worship and mission of this church. Brian is enthusiastic and prayerful - a great combination. And you have the luxury of one priest serving one parish. That is wonderful for the church and wonderful for the priest. I know Brian is also Rural Dean, and that pulls him away a bit. But he doesn't get pulled down or worn out by 3 or 4 PCC meetings, 3 or 4 APCM's, 3 or 4 Christmas and Summer fairs, Carol services, Nativities, Harvests etc etc! He is there for this church family. God has blessed you.

But like I said, do we always appreciate what we have when it's "just there"?

This family works well together and does many things. God has brought this family together for a reason. God has blessed this church with many things: people, skills, talents and a flexible building resource. The challenge is for every member of the family to find out the reason that God has brought all this together.

When Brian asked me to preach today, and gave me a completely blank canvas; no scripture, no theme: I didn't have a clue what I was going to do. Prayer was the starting point. And I waited for some prophetic "Word" of what God wanted to bring! Well that didn't and hasn't happened! I don't know what plans God has for this church in the future. BUT... I kept coming back to the word, "Prayer". Which was strange, because I think this is a church of prayer. But things kept coming back to a group of people seeking God's will for this family; a "looking forward people in prayer". It's up to you to find out what God's will is for this family. But I do believe that it's looking outwards to the community AND using this great facility.

Prayer is so important. Jesus needed to pray. The disciples healed when they prayed. Peter restored someone to life when he prayed. Prayer makes us strong. Prayer is how we build our relationship with God. Prayer is how we grow.

God wants to do something here, in this family. Last week we had a service of recommitment of our baptism vows and a booklet was given out. Have you read it? What did you think, was it challenging? If not – pray, and read it again! If you haven't read it yet, do so – this afternoon. Is God calling you to act; to be a part of a "looking forward" prayer team for this family? To be part of a prayer team helping Brian lead this church family forwards. It doesn't matter how old or how young you are. God wants something even bigger to happen here. He's waiting for you as a team, as a family, to ask what He wants you to do.

This is a great church family for Zoe, James, Ben and Sam to be a part of. It is a family who is going to do wonderful things together. Even if you had thought that God couldn't possibly use you: He can, and He wants to.

My prayer for this church is that you find out what God's plan is for this family now that he has brought you together. And you can do it:

- through prayer: *"Ask for anything in my name, and I will do it."*
- through asking and listening: *"If you love me, you will obey what I command."*
- by using everyone, including the children: *"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."* (Mark 10:14)
- through the power of the Holy Spirit: *"The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things."*
- And through Faith: *"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing."*

We pray at each service, and each day, "Your kingdom come, your will be done." Let's find out what God's will is for the family at St.Philip's.....And then do it.