**Morning Praise @ Home 9th July 2023**

**Opening prayer**

Blessed are you, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing; enable us by your power to be true to our calling and live holy and blameless lives before you all our days, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### Bible Readings 1 Peter 2: 9 – 10 John 17: 20 – 23

**Reflection from Philip**

**The Plural of Disciple is Church**

Do you remember those ‘What’s the difference’ jokes we used to tell when we were younger?

Q. What’s the difference between a piano and a tuna? A. You can tune a piano, but you can’t piano a tuna…

Q. What’s the difference between a hippo and a zippo? A. One is really heavy and the other is a little lighter…

Q. What’s the difference between a pirate and a jeweller? A. One watches the seas, while the other sees the watches….

Q. What’s the difference between ignorance & apathy? A. I don’t know and I don’t care….

I’ve got one more, but this time it’s not a joke (or at least it’s not meant to be!):

**… What is the difference between being a Church and being Disciples. Is there a relationship?**

This sermon is an attempt to answer that…….

A few weeks ago Ruth talked about what we meant by a **disciple.** We learnt that it was a form of **apprenticeship –** undertaken in community.

A disciple is an individual, someone with a sense of God given purpose. That sense of purpose can best be encouraged within a community – It’s not something you can easily do on your own.

The bible shows that a community can be a powerful platform for discipleship. Through bible study, praying together, sharing our experiences and our faith with others – we can grow as disciples, just as the early church did.

The Gospels often mention **disciples,** but the Epistles – letters written by the apostles to various churches and individuals – they only refer to **churches.**

Why was this? Peter, Paul, James & John were very focussed on making disciples. Neither is it that one word evolved & was replaced by another – the epistles & the gospels were written at about the same time. So….

just as the early followers needed a new word – **disciples** – to designate them as followers of Jesus, or apprentices….. so the group to which these individual disciples belonged needed a new name. The word **church,** in Greek, ***ecclesia,*** means ***‘a called out assembly – or ‘those who have been called out’.***

We are called to be disciples, like those fishermen who followed Jesus. But for them it was just the beginning. It would have counted for nothing if those fisherman had listened to Jesus’ words, followed him, but done nothing more. It was their subsequent ***actions*** that made them disciples. They listened, they followed, but they encouraged one another and then went out to make more disciples. They all had different gifts too.

In our reading from Peter 2: 9-10 we heard that ‘…we are a chosen people – that we may declare the praises of Him…’ So as disciples we are called out, we have been chosen, but chosen to fulfil a task – not just to attend…

I remember at Sunday school we used to get awards for attendance – maybe a star, or a badge, or a bible story booklet – or if you had been every Sunday, possibly a bible – perhaps a really nice one with pictures! That was great, but it isn’t the sort of Church Jesus was talking about. It’s not about attendance. We don’t give out prizes just for attending in ‘big church’! It’s about participating and engaging. The prize for that is a church that is alive, vibrant, with a sense of purpose.

In 1 Thessalonians 5 v11 we read ‘Therefore encourage one another, and build one another up…’ This is one of the key roles of coming together as a church. To encourage one another, that as disciples we can better follow Jesus and so actively seek to share with others.

We are called to be church. To form groups of disciples who need to encourage one another, pray with one another, help each other grow in understanding, sharing our faith with others…

That’s why **the plural of disciple is church**. If a church is not about growing in our faith, sharing and encouraging & making disciples, it isn’t church. Discipleship is not what the church does, it is what the church IS.

The church should be a community of disciples - not a building, not an event on Sundays, sorry Church of England, but it’s not an institution…

As a church, we should be a community of people, helping one another to deepen our relationship with God. Also reaching out for new disciples. The health of a church depends upon the health of our discipleship. We need to be lifelong learners in what is a learning community.

So what is Church? People drive down the road and see a building, they might say – ‘that’s a lovely church!’ If it’s midweek it might well be empty. That’s not a church!

Did you ever do this in Sunday School? (With your hands…) Here’s the church, here’s the steeple, open it up – here’s all the people! Yes, it’s a bit silly, but it taught us what church is all about – not the building, but the people.

We shouldn’t just want attendees at church. There is no future in that. That’s just a membership. We could have someone sitting on every pew in this building every Sunday, but if those people were just attending, it’s not actually church. We need to be an engaged group of people who belong. A group of people with a joint sense of purpose.

Maybe this ‘sense of purpose’ doesn’t sound like something that applies to you and me, but each of us has been given unique gifts for a purpose – some are listeners, some are talkers, some empathise, some are administrators, others are creative – musical or artistic. Some have a mix of gifts. Some aren’t sure what their gifts are or are too modest to even realise they have them. Modesty itself can be a gift!

Church in its true meaning can give us the opportunity to use these gifts, whatever they are, for the real purpose they were given to us – within a community of disciples, chosen, called out people, using our very diverse gifts, seeking to grow our faith and to share it. **Amen**

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?

**We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

**Prayers of intercession**

As some of us hear these prayers read out in church, and others read them alongside the service and Philip’s talk, we all share in an act of common and shared worship. We come to you now as your church united in prayer.

Father we thank you for your church. We thank you that though we are many, we are one body in Christ. We thank you for all those who play their part in ensuring a continuing presence in our communities in Burton, Puddington and Shotwick. We thank you for our Vicar John, for our lay readers and all those who help look after these beautiful buildings and manage the church yards.

We thank you for the gifts that you have given us, different and complimentary gifts that when brought together make the whole body stronger.

Father bless all who provide us with our needs. We pray for the farmers and the fishermen of our world and all who work to protect our daily health and safety, especially the NHS in this their 75th year.

Father we pray for all who are without resources, all homes where there is hunger, poverty and malnutrition. We give thanks for food banks and all who work in them, for individual and government support for the poor.

We pray for all who are in debt and those who have had their homes and possessions repossessed.

We pray for all who cannot see a future or a way out of poverty and depression. We pray that God will guide us, his people and his Church, to bring relief to all who suffer.

Father we ask for your support to all those who are unwell. Comfort and support them and be with their friends and families as they attempt to offer support too. Let us pause as we bring forward in prayer those we know who may be in need of care and support at this time.

We also think of all those who have recently lost family or friends. Comfort them in their grief and give them your strength every day.

Hear these prayers Lord and give us the peace only you can. Strengthen us in the coming week and help us to live as you would have us, using the gifts you have given us to be our best, and to your purpose.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be, that you may live and work to his praise and glory, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and remain with us always. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**