

The Anglican Parish of the Church of the Epiphany – September 1st 2019 Pentecost 12

Loving God, graft in our hearts the love of your name, increase in us true religion and nourish us in all goodness, Amen

I remember very clearly the occasion when I received communion for the first time, even though it happened almost 50 years ago now. At the time I was 11 years old and just about to go to High School. The service took place on a warm summer evening, and like you gathered today for your First Communion, I was sitting in the front row of Church with the group of young people who had been prepared by the priest for this moment. Interestingly the priest also happened to be my dad.

The very fact I can remember that day, a bit like the first time I was a server and the first time I went to school, reminds me that it was a very memorable moment in my life.

Today those of you gathered here at the front of Church will, I hope, remember this day for the rest of your life. You are already part of the Church, for you became part of the Church when you were baptised. Many of us don't remember our baptism, although we may have seen photographs of the moment, because usually we are babies or very small children when this happens. Today though you are making a statement of who you are: a follower of Jesus Christ by receiving communion for the first time.

Over the last few weeks you have been preparing for this occasion by attending sessions with Dianne. She has helped you understand better what your faith means. However this is not where the teaching and learning ends. There are some people in Church today who are even older than me, some of them twenty and thirty years older than me and they are still learning. For in the Christian faith we are always learning, always trying to be followers of Christ the best way we can.

The first reading helps us think about what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ. Although coming to Church on Sunday is important, it isn't the only thing we are expected to do as Christians. First we have to love one another (mutual love says the reading) which means loving everyone not just those who are kind or nice to you. We are also asked to look after people we don't know. So if a person is new to Church it is great if we can say hello to them; this is something we are can do. We are also encouraged not to worry from the love of money; in other words our lives should not consist only about thinking about money. The thing is when we love money we are happy or satisfied because however much money we have we will always want more.

Lastly in the first reading God promises to us that God will never leave us; so we can say: *The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid*. As followers of Christ we are called to trust God and not worry about anything.

The gospel passage is very interesting in light of today's celebration. It speaks about Jesus attending a meal and watching where everyone was sitting. When he saw this he told a parable (which is a story that helps us understand how God wants us to behave).

Today you kids are sitting in place of honour – at the front, and you will come forward to receive communion first, before everyone else. And after the service there will be a big party to celebrate this very important and special occasion.

Today you have been invited to sit in this place of honour, but next week you will be back sitting where you usually do.

So today you will be the focus of attention, it is your special day, you will receive communion first, receive a certificate to mark this occasion and later in the Hall there will be party for everyone. But next Sunday it will be normal again with one important difference. That is you will be receiving communion for the second time as you will for the rest of your lives. It is very important for you and it is wonderful for us as a congregation to have 14 young people now receiving communion. It is the biggest celebration of this kind we have had at Epiphany for many years and for certain for as long as I have been the rector here.

Often on a day like today I want to share with you something that you will remember. Something that you will stay with you not just next week or even next month or even next year but way beyond that.

There is the old story of the priest talking with one of their parishioners. The man was complaining about the church services. He felt if they just sang a couple of good hymns and there was a good sermon, all the rest was just words. The priest said to the man: actually the service is not for you, it is for God. When we come to church we do the best we can to sing and pray to the very best of our ability. That is what a service is for: for God. If we get something out of it, fine, if not we need to remember it is for God.

So as you prepare to receive communion for the first time, and to the rest of the congregation I'd say remember the service isn't for us, it is for God. We should do all we can to worship God to the best of our ability, but what we get out of the service is not as crucial as remembering that this service, like all services, is for God.

As a bonus, if you like a biblical text to remember today we just need to look at the second reading. It includes these words: *The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid*. So today and every day remember God is your helper and therefore you never have reason to be afraid.

Amen

The Reverend Stephen Rowe, 01-09-2019