

New beginnings: A Church for the Future

John 6:5-13

Some of you will know that I'm involved in helping a church in London Road going through a difficult time as it goes into a union with a neighbouring church. At a meeting last week we began the process of trying to think what needed to happen to help close one church with dignity and compassion, but, more challengingly, to wonder about what the new church that was to be formed might be like. We had to think about a name – it will probably be known as Meadowbank Church.

A Church is so much more than simply a name. This church is more than just Morningside Parish Church.

What **makes** a church a real church is what it does, and who it welcomes, and how it gets involved with the community around it.

What **makes** a Church has to do with how the people who belong to that Church, and those who come from time to time – have a look at the gifts and the talents and the abilities and the imagination and the courage and the commitment that God has shared with them – and then use that imagination, courage and commitment into shaping a vision for a community that reaches out and around.

It's not the name that makes the Church, it's what that name becomes known for that will matter. It will certainly be true for that new Church that will be created in Meadowbank early next year, and it remains true for this Church here.

Churches, for all that they look like big static edifices that are solid and change little, are in fact bodies that change and adapt, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, but they never stay still. Churches rightly respect tradition, but their focus is always looking ahead to the future.

A bit like humans. Whilst it might be handy to have eyes in the back of your head, God placed our eyes facing forward, looking to the horizons ahead, looking to the future.

What kind of Church do we want to be? What kind of Church does our community need us to be? What kind of Church does God need us to be?

As we think thankfully about the gifts God has given to us at Harvest time – and there are many gifts, so also God challenges us to think how those gifts might be used to help us find our way into the future. It's a bit unnerving, but it's also very exciting. Like opening those boxes with the young people, and not knowing exactly what the gift was going to be, and then discovering it, and wondering how we might use it.

If we are to think about a new beginning for a Church, like the Church in Meadowbank, what sort of gifts would you think they might need? They'll certainly need money – lets make no bones about that. Churches don't run on good wishes and platitudes. The same is true here.

We are called by God to give according to our means, and to be willing enough to do this.

But those other gifts, is it more than just a rhetorical question to ask what gifts they might need, and come up with the gifts the young people found in the boxes?

Kindness

Generosity

Welcome

Hope

Peace

Food and Drink

Faith

Sharing

Love

These are only some of the gifts a Church might need – but without those gifts, I would go as far as to say that there is no Church. There might be a gathering of nice people, doing nice things, but niceness isn't enough.

It needs all of those words, a new church, an old church, any church. And it needs to use those words and live them out in a way that says to the community around – look – this is what is possible; this is what we are like; we invite you to work with us in this way for these purposes.

If I'd been really clever I'd have worked out a whole lot of words that would have spelled out the name Jesus. But these words don't need to spell out His Name. Jesus is more than just a name. He is an example, a challenge, and an invitation.

Any Church looking for a new beginning, any Church wanting to have a future, needs to have Jesus somewhere around in order to keep it honest. The Jesus Who looks at what we are thinking, and what we are saying, and what we are doing, and asks us, "Are you sure?"

The theme of Harvest is a beautiful one – because it is about gifts, and sharing, and acknowledging the generosity of a God Who gives. The theme of pledging is a wonderful one – because it challenges us to reflect on what we're doing, and what we might commit to doing in the future, and work out how we might get there.

There are many more words that help us look to the future and the new beginnings Jesus is inviting us to make.

But hear them again, and ask where they feature in your life, and how you live them out; and where they feature in the life of our Church, and how we might live them out here, and in the community around us.

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In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen