

Tony Ingleby's Farewell Sermon – July 2016



Based on 1 Corinthians 12 & John 13 & 15

Last week I got arrested. Does that ever happen to you?

You see something that looks beautiful. And the impulse of the moment overrides your civilised inhibitions. You give way to that primitive urge.

So you get arrested - by the awe and wonder of beauty. You feel the love of God just looking at a flower.

And it's all around us. We don't have to go to an art gallery or a flower show to find beauty. We don't have to watch a beauty contest to see beautiful people.

But beauty is subjective. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. So when I get arrested by beauty I thank the God who created that beauty; and I thank the God who loved me enough to put that beauty in my eye.

And I sometimes wonder how folk who don't believe in God deal with those moments. Where's the evolutionary advantage in humans appreciating the beauty of a sunset? So why has God put that beauty in our eyes?

But that's not what I want to talk about. I want to talk about you. I want to talk about beautiful people.

I have noticed in every church where I have served that the people look younger to me when I leave than they did when I arrived.

It is not, of course, that I run or promote a cosmetic regime as a side-line to the Gospel ministry. And it is not just that, as I grow older, policemen and bishops and congregations get younger.

I think it is that I have confused youth and beauty. Congregations do not grow younger; they grow more beautiful.

You are more beautiful to me now because our growing love has allowed me to see more of your inner beauty showing in your faces.

There is a lot of love in all the congregations and communities where I have been privileged to minister. And, though we are all still ratbags, (and I think I have told you that plenty of times)

though we are all still ratbags, that love is enabling us to blossom and grow: grow towards becoming beautiful people, the beautiful people God has created and called us to be.

We are not there yet, nor will we be, in the brief spell we spend on planet earth.

But we are a work in progress, his work in progress. And the soil of this place where he has put us, the atmosphere and the constraints of this place where he has called us to be are well suited, not only to our physical well-being and our intellectual and emotional well-being, but also to our spiritual well-being.

Take just one feature of this place; take our diversity. Did you read the faith stories that Mike ran on the website during Lent? What a diverse bunch of people we are! What a refreshing change from the standard spiel sometimes delivered at Gospel Rallies.

'I was a complete prat till I met Jesus, and now I'm a lovely, but deeply humble and grateful, nice guy'

The diversity and reality of your faith stories is so much more Good News than that formulaic drivel.

And your diversity is not just in your personal histories. You have diverse tastes, diverse hobbies, diverse interests and abilities....

Take your diversity in music as an example which penetrates right into the heart of your worship. Some like drums and electric guitars, some like the choir and organ... Even the Ukulele has been played in this church!

Some enjoy Traditional 1950s style using Victorian hymns & Anglican chant.... Some enjoy 1980s Kendrick and Redman songs led by a band so we remember when our children were young. There are even some who like 21st Century music....

And those in the small country churches enjoy singing whatever the terrorist on the organ leads them into with old favourites and new challenges and enhanced worship.

And some just like being quiet at eight o'clock on a Sunday morning....

And you like different degrees of ceremony. There are those who like things done in a particular way that is laid down by particular traditions and word formulae: they have had something of a hard time over the last ten years.

There are those who are happy with anything which the Church of England allows: and they haven't always got their way.

There are some who have a horror of any Anglican liturgy; you know I think Anglican Liturgy is beautiful at its best, avoidable at its worst and I retain my confidence that it is good for every Christian who speaks English and I keep putting bits on your liturgical plate so you can learn to like something that is good for you.

Your diversity is a strength. Liturgically it is a strength because, between you, you can provide everything which God calls you to provide in reaching out to the whole community.

And to get a picture of what I mean by everything think of the people who will visit our churches between Harvest and New Year. Think of the range of ages and experiences of those who will be attending Remembrance, Carol Services, Christingle, Crib and other Christmas Services quite apart from any special initiatives you devise.

Within the context of the Transition of this Benefice you have to share the love of God and the Good News of Jesus with them all. And your diversity gives you a talent pool to do exactly that.

Together you make the Body of Christ. The absence of any member, the exclusion, including self-exclusion, of any member, the ignoring of any member, makes you a crippled body.

By the Holy Spirit you are the Body of Christ. You need your unity to be **able**-bodied Christ.

You need your diversity to be **full** bodied Christ. You need your love to appreciate the **whole** body of Christ.

You need love to discern the part that each one can play. Love to encourage and develop the effectiveness of each part.

You need love to step forward. Sometimes you need love to hold back so that someone more reticent will step forward into their perfect place

It is essential that the folk of Liskeard and Dobwalls and St Keyne and St Pinnock know that you are disciples of Jesus, because Jesus wants to call them all to be his disciples through your witness.

By this will they all know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

So how will you let your love show?

What gifts do you have that will show the love of Jesus to single mums, elderly folk in Residential homes, isolated elderly folk living alone, school children or poor people living on slender benefits and paying twice as much for heat and light as you and me.

What can you offer to enrich the experience of the occasional visitor to Church services: A warm welcome at the door, an invitation to sit with you, an escort to the Upper Hall for a cup of coffee, or do you have skills in music or communication or setting out a room?

What creative gifts have you that would enrich Star each month, or the gift of strength and mobility that would enable you to distribute it for more people read? Could you help lead worship, read lessons, bring prayer needs to the congregation? Could you welcome people into your home to pray or study or drink coffee and talk?

Could you be part of the outreach at Friday Club, Open the Book, ABC or Messy Church?

Could you sing with the Choir or one of the 9.30 singing groups? Could you help with the Church maintenance or the Churchyard upkeep?

Are you good at talking to people or, more valuably, listening to them? Do you drive a car and have a spare seat to offer? Can you make tea or cakes or both? Do you have artistic, poetic, acting or technological gifts?

Without you offering and using your gifts, the churches of this benefice will limp along doggedly, but with you and with all your gifts the churches of this benefice can be the Body of Christ, reaching vigorously out into the community with healing and transforming love.

And the shorthand for that is 'Being the Church'

So to sum up.

You are beautiful, you are gifted, you are diverse, and because you have the gift of love you are united, you are One Body. You have a mission field and you have a mission.

Don't waste time just trying to survive the Transition; Get on with lifesaving, get on with serving and sharing, get on with living, get on with being the Church