**Sermon – Sunday 23rd January 2022 – Epiphany 3**

**May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

I am not a great fan of reality TV shows – and there is a proliferation of them these days on all the various TV channels.

Whilst the novelty value of them in the early days meant that they made for interesting and amusing viewing, as the years have gone on and the producers have had to come up with more and more ideas to keep the public interested, those who participate have become much more of the focus for what they are looking to get out of the TV show rather than completing the particular show or task.

My one weakness is this area of TV shows is the Apprentice, although I have not been as committed to the recent series as I was in the past.

For those of you who are not familiar with this show, there are 16 aspiring business men and women seeking to win an investment into their business from Lord Alan Sugar and over the series of approx. 12 weeks split into 2 teams they have complete various tasks, etc. and each week at least one contestant is “fired” for not being suitable for the investment.

The format of the show each week is the task that they have to complete – be that designing a product, sourcing various items, devising a marketing strategy – and the two teams compete with each other. Lord Sugar decides which is the best team, etc. and at least one member of the losing team is fired.

One of the “joys” of watching the show is seeing how the individuals use their gifts and talents to contribute towards the task and how people can volunteer to do things that they are not equipped for in the hope of both winning the task and being noticed.

Often on their team will be someone better equipped to carry out a particular role but for whatever reason they do not undertake in on behalf of the team.

As a result one of the explanations that is asked of the losing team is why people were not doing the role they were suitable for i.e. round pegs in square holes.

Thus there are two key elements to being successful each week – the particular task that is set and the best use of the talents of the team members to ensure success.

A task

Using individuals talents for the benefit of the team

Sound familiar?

The two readings that we have heard this morning are just that – a task and a call to use the talents of the individuals for the benefit of the Church and by inference God.

What is the task?

The reading from Luke’s Gospel is one of the passages that hopefully we are all familiar with and is a manifesto for the task that Jesus had taken human form to do.

Known as the “Nazareth manifesto” it is a prophecy from Isaiah 61 and Jesus declared it as being fulfilled on this day in the synagogue.

The familiar passage highlights the ministry of the Messiah, which is Jesus’ vocation and calling and some 2,000 years later is also ours.

Jesus had returned from the wilderness filled with the Spirit and stood up and declared the fulfilment of the prophecy but if we look at what he was called to do and what our task is today, can we truly say that it has been fulfilled?

Well, this is a yes and no answer.

Yes it had been fulfilled in that Christ, about whom it was written, was standing in their presence but the work that he was called to do has yet to be fulfilled.

So what is this work or the task to refer back to our analogy?

* Bring good news to the poor.
* Proclaim release to the captives.
* Recovery of sight to the blind.
* Let the oppressed go free.
* To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

These task descriptions are metaphors for the work that is actually required and if we look at the tasks in our modern day context we could re-write them as follows:-

* Tell people of the love of God and the forgiveness of sins – the good news;
* Release people from the things that can hold them back from being the person that God wants them to be;
* Open peoples’ eyes to the word of God and the possibilities that God provides;
* Free people from the restrictions of the religious leaders and priests of the day that were more concerned with keeping to the letter rather than the spirit of the Law.
* To declare the time has come when the Messiah is here.

Here and now they speak of the need for each of us to take the gospel message out into the community and seek to live out the values that Jesus calls us to and to undertake the actions that are required.

To meet the needs of those in our community who may be struggling with life, isolated and alone, struggling with financial pressures, addictions, ill-health or any of the other challenges that can affect any of us at anytime.

This can be undertaken through our own efforts or by linking in with other organisations or agencies.

There are no excuses for not knowing what we are called to do.

So much for the task. What about the team?

Well the team is you and me, members of the body of Christ through his Church.

Our reading from Paul’s letter to the early church in Corinth highlights some of the challenges that the early Christian community was facing and which can affect any group of people seeking to work together for a common purpose.

Paul was highlighting that everyone is equal in the sight of God and thus when we are looking at how we relate to one another within a Church community we should value everyone equally.

Yes, individuals will have different skills and abilities and be able to undertake different tasks – just as different parts of our physical body undertake different functions - and we need everyone to use their own skills and abilities to the best for the whole to function well.

If we keep comparing ourselves to the next person – either by thinking that we are better or superior to them or that we are not as valued as they are – we will not achieve the task that is given to us to the best of our collective ability.

An example I can relate to from many years ago is when I was a young leader at the summer camps I help lead and I spent each day charging around with the campers, playing games and leading activities, etc.

Exhausting work but most of the time I had the energy.

On the team were some older members who as far as I was concerned appeared to potter around and not do much during the day.

Now some 30+ years later I am one of the older members and I have discovered all the tasks that they were doing quietly in the background – cleaning, taking the rubbish out, purchasing the food, tidying up behind the chaos caused by the campers and “young guns” on the team.

Both type of team member is vital to the running of the camp.

So it is with our Church communities and any Christian work that we are involved in.

The focus has to be on the completion of the task that we have been set by God and not in our own self-advancement or ego.

Some of the work that we are called to is not always glamorous or up-front yet is important and of equal value.

And as a church community we must not let these differences or our egos get in the way of the task.

To revert back to my Apprentice analogy, often the reason for the team losing is that the members are too focused on their own egos and pushing themselves forward that they lose sight of the objective which to achieve the task.

Sadly we are all too aware of churches that tear themselves apart because of individuals pulling in opposite directions and not focusing on what we should be doing.

That does not mean that we should all agree about everything and it is healthy to disagree within a spirit of love but where this causes a problem for the community, as Paul was highlighting, it is wrong and should cease.

Each of us gathered here this morning is part of the church community and each of us is called to contribute to the task to the best of our ability and using the skills and gifts that we have.

Again to us the example that Paul gives regarding the body, we all know that as individuals we have different physical attributes and strengths and thus physically we can do different things – I was never going to be a rugby prop forward but I was quite nifty on the wing with a hockey stick – and was accepting of that fact.

Again within the Christian community we need to accept the gifts that God has given us without yearning to be something or someone that we are not called to be – jealousy is not to be encouraged.

Tasks and teams.

Two important aspects of our life together as a Christian community and which we are called to through our faith in Christ.

As you journey on may you play your part in achieving the work to which we are all called.

**Amen.**