

HOLY TRINITY VISION STATEMENT SERMON 1: SPIRITUALITY

Introduction:

This will be the first of a series of 5 sermons given by different members of the clergy on the 5 parts of the Holy Trinity vision statement which we have been working on over the past few months and which is published in the parish development booklet. The statement (which is still in draft form) is intended to help us, focus on the particular things we feel called to be and do under God in order to bring the Kingdom of God to this community and to the wider world.

It is intended to be a list of things which describes both how we are and what we aspire to be.

It is a list that aims not just to restate Christian doctrine but to express what might be different about this church from other churches.

I hope it will turn out finally to be a statement that the vast majority of us can feel very positive about and indeed inspired by

– something that will guide us forward as we seek to be faithful to God’s call to us in this place.

Opening sentence:

We aim to be a community which follows the way of Christ.

There are two fundamentally important points here in this opening sentence:

a. Community.

The idea of community was very strong in Jesus’ teaching and in the early church’s experience:

- that salvation, healing and wholeness did not come to isolated individuals but to communities and only to individuals in as much as they were part of that community.

You may feel your most intense spiritual experiences are when you are on your own and that may be true but you are still part of a community and are able to survive because of that community.

Even hermits see themselves as part of a parent community and consider that to be central to their calling.

St. Paul, beautifully describes the church as being like a single body: each part connected to and dependent on the others and that if one part suffers, they all suffer – if one part rejoices, they all rejoice.

The sense of our connectedness to one another in this world is gradually and terribly being eroded. The result of this is that the strong will survive and more and more the weak will go under: “you are the weakest link – goodbye”.

The church stands prophetically and strongly opposed to this drift – the world needs us to.

But learning what true community means – and will cost us – will take time and commitment – and another sermon series!

But let us mark this up now at the start that this is what we are about because this is what Jesus was about.

But what sort of community? What marks us out from any other club or social organisation because we are not the only ones working on community.

b. Follows the way of Christ.

Well first of all, very simply and, in a way covering everything:

We are a community who are committed to following the way of Christ.

Christ is our founder, our inspiration, our focus, our guide and our joy.

Christ is all for us and enough for us.

All we do is in order to develop a loving relationship with him and to learn what it means to follow him.

Christ is the focus of all that we are and all that we do.

But how do we work this out and what makes us different from any other church?
Well, this is where we begin our 5 bullet points that we feel makes Holy Trinity distinctive.

You will be glad to know I will only deal with the first today, but even that contains so much that I will only be able to skim through it.

First Bullet point

Cherishing a sacred space at the heart of our community, valuing holiness and beauty and, centred on the Eucharist, offering a rich diversity of worship which embraces people from all church backgrounds or none.

a. Cherishing a sacred space, valuing holiness and beauty.

What does this mean?

Well, to be honest, of course, it may mean different things to different people, but the heart of it for me is that we are recognising that there is something going on here which is beyond what we see and recognise in simply human terms

- some element which/who is mysteriously present, which is the inspiration and energy behind all we do and which we, through our prayers and liturgy, are trying to make space for.

In short “God”! But I was trying to give a sense of what it is we might mean when we actually say the word!

“Holiness” and “beauty” are words which we particularly associate with God, which we especially value and which we long to be more present in our lives and in the world.

But how do they come?

We realise there is something mystical here – there is no formula – no human or scientific way we can create it (though science and human endeavour can certainly help).

No, it is more a sense of the fact that, through our faith, we know it is there – right at the heart of reality

- and through our religious practices we can actually experience and share it: “God with us”: holiness and beauty, grace and truth.

b. Centred on the Eucharist

And so we come to our worship. But it is important to have said what I have just said because we worship for a purpose – not just because we like it or because we have built up a habit of doing it, but because we value the holiness and beauty of God and we want to experience it by making space for it in our lives.

“Centred on the Eucharist” is not something every church or even every Anglican church would say, but it is a particular mark of Holy Trinity.

We may explore all sorts of different types of worship, but in the end, the heart of it all for us is the Eucharist (or communion).

Again, this is another sermon series but just a few key points about this:

- i. The Eucharist takes us back to Jesus himself – whether through the Last Supper or through his habit of giving thanks for and breaking bread with people whenever they gathered – this service gives us very strong links with the historical person of Jesus
- ii. This was the earliest form of worship associated with the first disciples: known in the Acts of the Apostles as “the breaking of the bread”
- iii. The Eucharist is a complete service – it encapsulates all aspects of worship and serves as a source from which all other types of worship can emerge
- iv. Crucially it contains the physical element of bread and wine reminding us vitally that our faith is fundamentally about flesh and blood
- v. The form of service we use today is based on the earliest forms of worship we have records of dating back to the third century.

- c. offering a rich diversity of worship which embraces people from all church backgrounds or none.

Diversity! We mention it twice in the 5 bullet points as something we particularly value here at Holy Trinity (one whole bullet point is devoted to it).

There are three key reasons for this:

- i. Jesus came for all of humanity and humanity is extraordinarily and wonderfully diverse.
- ii. The parish we serve is diverse
- iii. As it happens, this congregation is quite diverse

This is wonderful – but a real challenge for us when we come to talking about forms of worship

- because, as you know, what inspires one will bore another, what feeds one is irrelevant to another.
- The music that fills one person's heart leaves another cold.

How do we cope with this both creatively and positively?

Whilst recognising there will always be a limit to the diversity of any one church (we cannot be all things to all people – that's why we have different denominations) nevertheless:

- i. Practically

We try to make our main common services broad in their appeal so that a fairly wide variety of people can relate to them. This particularly relates to diversity of musical styles.

At other times we can explore different styles which may not suit all but will suit some – which is fine.

- ii. Attitude.

If we are only focused on what I like or what I think is good – I will be in trouble and, no doubt find something to complain about in every service I go to.

If however, I start with the premise that it is a wonderful thing that such a diverse group of people are willing to come together for the sake of Christ,

- then perhaps I can even get to the place of rejoicing in the aspects of worship that I don't like because they may be feeding and strengthening someone else.

Perhaps it would be good if we all made a point of actually going to a service that was not our kind of thing sometimes

- just to get a sense of what other people value
- we might even value something in it ourselves

Conclusion.

So, a community which seeks to follow the way of Christ and minister to the huge diversity of people we encounter – some huge challenges here for us.

But, we can do it, I believe, if we make sure we cherish the sacred space at the centre and continue always to value the holiness and beauty we see in God.