

Sunday 4 August 2024 – 10 after Trinity

2 Samuel 11.26 – 12.13; Ephesians 4.1-16; John 6.24-35

As you probably know, I am a part-time Chaplain at the Ipswich Hospital Chaplaincy Department. This currently involves working on Tuesdays, as well as being responsible for a weekend on-call duty each month (from 4pm on Fridays to 8am on Mondays). The on-call involves being at the other end of the phone at all times, and may require me to go in, in an emergency and give the patient the Last Rites, which means anointing them with the sign of the cross, laying-on of hands, and blessing them. On Sunday mornings we go in to do a little talk on the hospital radio, and then go to the patients who have said they would like to receive Holy Communion on Sundays, as well as visiting those who have been designated End of Life.

On my Tuesday visits I currently visit patients on Somersham Ward, which as some of you may know is the cancer ward, and quite close to the Chapel. People on that ward are there for multiple reasons, eg tests, chemo or radiotherapy, or operation procedures, which can sometimes make conversation rather tricky or even impossible, because patients are angry at what they have been dealt; others are philosophical, and yet others are looking forward to the next stage of life....

In quite a few cases people appear to have made a complete recovery, and are therefore almost euphoric: “the doctors and nurses have performed a miracle for me: I’ll be forever grateful for what they have all done”. I have to be careful what I say in response, but if I know the patients well, I venture to suggest that the talents enabling the medical experts to do what they have done, come in the last resort from God, the ultimate enabler.

I’m saying all this to you, because of what our readings tell us today: in his letter to the people of Ephesus Paul is at pains to point out what Jesus has done for us all. “When he ascended on high, he gave gifts to his people. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some of them prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, to equip the saints...for the work of building up the body of Christ”. You could quite plausibly include doctors and nurses in this list, because they are using their God-given talents for the benefit of the whole community. In other words it is a question of attribution. It also applies to the makers of music, literature, sport – well almost

anything you can think of, including manufacturing, and anything requiring verbal or other skills. God lies at the heart of them all.

At this point we come at last to today's Gospel, from John. This is a continuation of the narrative we have been hearing over the past few weeks, first from Mark and now from John, who is the expert in choosing which events can best describe who Jesus is and why he has come into the world. So for example we heard from Mark about Jesus's healings, about feeding the five thousand, walking on water and so on. But now we switch to John, who records the people's reaction to what they have just seen and heard Jesus do and say, and his response to their questions. He wants to help them lift their horizons above his deeds to what they signify – principally that God has set his seal on Jesus, which requires the people to believe that he is the son of God. Forgetting that he has just performed several signs, which surely would be proof enough of his origin, they ask for more along the lines of Moses providing the Israelites with manna to eat in the wilderness. This gives Jesus the opportunity of telling them where it actually came from, and this leads to a dramatic moment when Jesus makes it clear that it is God who sends the true bread (i.e.himself) into the world to give it life, which is what we shall be doing shortly.

Thus we come back to what was more or less our starting point, about the giving of gifts to us, God's people, who can then use those gifts to the advantage of everyone. Humility forbids claiming the credit for ourselves (a failing we all recognise), but those who are truly humble know it well and use it and in doing so are spreading the light and life of Jesus Christ all around them. 3.8.2024