

Minister's Letter. October 2017. NPURC.

Been thinking a lot about how we get to know each other as church communities. Many of us know a few people well. We know their birthdays and their family situations and perhaps we know the things they like or dislike and maybe the things that make them happy or sad. And this is great as we develop friendships through our faith journey and, as we walk alongside each other, we can grow and change and flourish together. But what about the people we do not really know? What do we do? Many of us come to church on a Sunday and then we do not have anything to do with the building or people until the next time we are there for worship. And that is fine, but being part of a community involves getting to know those alongside whom we worship.

By now both churches to whom I minister know how I advocate eating together, sharing food. Most times when I suggest an event, the question is now asked- what are we eating? Now I do appreciate that this is amusing, but it has a great Biblical prerogative. Jesus ate and drank with all kinds of people. He did not discriminate. He even used a small boy's picnic to feed a whole crowd! So we could do much worse than follow this. What about eating with people you do not 'normally' talk to? How about inviting someone 'new' round for lunch? Or out for a coffee? What about suggesting a group of you go out for lunch following worship or do a 'bring and share open house' occasionally? When we eat together we deepen our conversations, we open up to each other more, we have space to ask questions and have discussions that cannot be had following worship in a crowded foyer or noisy hall. In the past few months we have had some great opportunities in both churches to get to talk over food- when our German visitors came to NP and the Afternoon Cream Tea and Ghanaian evening at WE. Times of fellowship and food create spaces for conversations and deepening relationships.

The reason I suggest this is that we talk of being welcoming, we talk of being inclusive, but how often do we really talk to the people alongside whom we worship? Really talk? Many of us carry burdens or worries or issues from our past that have shaped us. Many of us cover up these things really well and so the person that we portray to others is not quite the person we know ourselves to be. If we believe in a God who calls us into authentic relationships then I feel it is important for us to make an effort to allow these relationships to be authentic and some of that is about being honest and vulnerable as well as learning more about each other for the sake of friendship and loving our neighbour. We cannot get to that sort of depth of conversation in 5 minutes following worship, but there is a chance we might over a coffee or a cake or a serving of Spaghetti Bolognese!

When we talk over food, in groups or one to one, then we can share some more of the reality of living. Because it isn't always easy! And allowing ourselves to share these highs and lows is kind of scary but also an important part of coming together and finding fellowship. Inviting people out for a coffee, round for tea or to a meal gives the opportunity for us to experience each other fully, however that displays itself in each of us. I have to say that when I get to sit down for a coffee and have a chat, I always end up learning something new, find opportunities that give joy, have the chance to share my experiences and chew over the impact they have on me, and am blessed by the encounter.

God in Christ came to live on earth as a vulnerable man, fully human and in doing so Jesus showed us how to live in community. And showed us that relationship building is the key to this: getting to know one another and risking being changed by the encounters; speaking the truth; expressing ourselves honestly; sharing our experiences and listening to each other; and sharing the joy and sorrow. Love lived out in community. Spending time getting to know each other because we are precious children of God. Because we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. Because we can. So why not give it a try?
Blessings, Jenny.