

During the time I trained at St Francis' College we used to have an address at the Friday evening compline service. Compline is the last of several services of prayers said during the day.

I remember having difficulty concentrating on one of the preachers who addressed us. His sermons were usually helpful but he had an unfortunate practice of looking at his notes and then at a fixed spot somewhere in the distance.

So mechanical was the action of his head bobbing up and down that he appeared robotic. The only way I found that I could concentrate on what he had to say was by closing my eyes and just listening to the words.

I subsequently had the opportunity to preach in his church and found that I was unable to gain eye contact with anyone in the congregation. It would appear that his parishioners adopted a similar strategy to the one I had employed in order to

hear what he was saying. To listen to the preacher people needed to eliminate visual contact.

The example I have shared is one where the hearers made every attempt to hear what the speaker was saying even when the mode of delivery became an impediment. What we have in the gospel account is almost the exact opposite.

There the townspeople recognized Jesus as "the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon": but they discounted what he had to say and refused to accept him as the Messiah, because they were unable to accept that one of their own could be the Chosen One.

I wonder how many times you and I have failed to listen to what someone had to say because of whom we thought them to be. Have you stopped listening to one another?

Are there things that some of the members of this congregation are saying and may have been saying for some time that you have stopped listening to? Do you switch off when you see a particular member of the congregation coming? Do you do all in your power to avoid engaging in conversation with certain persons?

The question this morning's gospel reading raises for me is that if I shut out what someone is saying: "What might I, what might we miss out on? What is the underlying essence in what the person is saying?"

We can get caught up in who the person is. We remember times when they have berated us in the past with their stories about this and that and their extravagant proposals about how the Government, the Council, the Archbishop, the Diocese, or the parish might do this or that. There can be a disconnect between our understanding of what we can achieve; as individuals or us as a

community and what the person believes to be possible or even essential.

The question of course is, "What is the underlying message? What is this person trying to say to me, to us, to the church, to the world?" If Jesus was to speak to me, to us, through a fellow human being; it is likely that it will be through someone we know. Is it possible that Jesus just might be speaking to us through someone we have stopped listening to?

Churches are complex organisms. Parishioners come in all shapes and sizes, from every strata in society. We hold a diversity of views on any given subject. We represent a cross-section of political views. We have vastly divergent intellectual capacities and differ greatly in our ability to listen effectively.

All this means that it is extraordinarily difficult for parishioners to engage meaningfully with one another. Decision making can become the

preserve of the few; disempowering and dispiriting many.

At last week's synod Dr Peter Catt moved a motion on behalf of the Social Responsibilities Commission, "commending and encouraging parishes, commissions and agencies to:"

"Affirm the value of dialogue as an approach to creating safe and respectful environments for coming to grips with sensitive issues and explore and utilise tools such as Open Space and Talking Circles in carrying out such work."

The rationale behind bringing this motion to synod was that complex issues and problems are a part of fragmented systems where there are no simple solution. No individual or single organization has the capacity to address every aspect of a problem.

The Cathedral congregation has used these processes to engage with a number of issues.

They have energized and mobilized members of the congregation producing remarkable results.

As a result of the carriage of this motion the Social Responsibilities Commission is now empowered to continue sharing these methods, tools and approaches throughout the Diocese by making available education, training and engagement opportunities and resources.

I mention this aspect of the work of the Social Responsibilities Commission because it strikes me as being a resource that could enable parishes in general and this parish in particular to engage in discussions about the future.

There are other ways of engaging other than those proposed by Dr Catt and the Social Responsibilities Committee. Indeed parish council has discussed some ways this parish might be able to do just that. The important thing is that whatever method is chosen that it enables everyone who

wishes to participate to have the opportunity to be heard.

Bishop Cameron Venables the bishop for the western region of our diocese and bishop for this area has provided a date when he is available to conduct a consultation with the parish. I will take that to the Wardens and parish council and advise you of the date shortly.

When Jesus was unable to gain a hearing in his home town he sent the disciples to other villages. They were to wear sandals but take nothing, trusting in the Lord to provide.

It's a reminder that if we are engaged in the Lord's business that God will provide the means for us to carry out that work. The disciples were to stay where they received hospitality until they were ready to move on.

Sometimes we dismiss suggestions by fellow parishioners because we can't imagine how we

could possibly resource them. We know they are beyond our personal capacity and the capacity of the parish as we know it.

The thing is that you and I are engaged in the church of God. This is God's church, we are God's children. If we believe that God wants us to be involved in a particular area of ministry, God will provide us with the resources to undertake that ministry.

We are presently involved in a number of areas of ministry; many of which are capable of further development. So in many ways we have already taken the first or several steps on the road.

What I have been encouraging people to do since I have been here is to take the next baby step on the journey. To think about where does what you are doing, in whatever area of ministry you are engaged in, fit into God's plan in general and into the life of St Paul's Ipswich in particular.

I have suggested to the Variety Market people for example, that if the parish had a simple brochure outlining what St Paul's has to offer this could be displayed on the counter there. Such a brochure could have other applications in other situations.

I'm sure there are many other areas of parish life where one part of the body could support and encourage the other. Through our networks of friends and acquaintances we can find pathways to advance all manner of unitive.

Jesus went to his home town attempting to carry on the ministry he had exercised in other parts of the country. He was rejected simply because the people could not accept that someone they knew well could be an agent of the kingdom of God.

We risk not hearing what God has to say to us if we stop listening to one another.

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