

Do you see the world through a glass half empty or a glass half full prism?

We can experience situations where our mood alternates between elation and depression. If something good happens we are likely to feel good.

If something bad has happens we may see things differently. We may be incapable of seeing anything, in other than a negative light.

What strikes me about this morning's reading from Ephesians is the number of positive, even effusive, words that are contained in this short passage.

We have the **"riches"** of his **"glory"**, **"power"** through his Spirit", "the love of Christ that **"surpasses"** knowledge", "you may be **"filled"** with all the **"fullness"** of God" and "accomplish **"abundantly."**

It is an upbeat prayer pleading with God to pour upon the people of Ephesus every possible blessing. This is how Jesus wants us to live. "I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10) Jesus said.

In today's gospel story a large crowd came to Jesus. He said to Philip "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Andrew found a boy with five barley loaves and two fish. Jesus blessed them and then fed the crowd.

The real point is this: not only was the crowd satisfied, they filled twelve baskets from the fragments left over. How reminiscent of the wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. There they ran out of wine.

Now I would imagine that the host would have catered for what he felt was an adequate serving of wine for the wedding feast. So I think we can assume that the guests would already have

imbibed a little if not a lot to exhaust what had been provided.

Jesus supplied not a little more, not an adequate amount! Jesus supplied 120 to 180 gallons of wine: an abundance in anyone's understanding.

These two stories emphasize the nature of God. We have a God who lavishes love and blessing on us and who provides abundant resources to meet our every need.

The gospel story reminds us that we have the capacity to quickly forget God. No sooner had the disciples cleaned up after the feeding of the five thousand than they were acting as if they didn't expect the unexpected.

On their way to the other side of the lake a strong wind blew, the sea became rough and they thought they saw Jesus walking on the water. They were terrified.

In life we encounter many situations where people are in need. It seems to call into question the notion that God provides abundantly for our needs.

When we are anxious we find it hard to remember how blessed we are. At such times the abundance of God's love and provision can be clouded by the immediate perceived crisis.

The disciples became anxious facing the vagaries of the sea and seeing what looked like someone walking on the water. They questioned what they thought they were seeing.

When we experience things that are beyond our experience we can become anxious.

The Old Testament story raises another dimension to this notion of God's abundance. There we have the unsavoury story of David seducing Bathsheba and arranging for her husband to be killed.

God provides abundantly. If we were able to distribute the bounty of the earth fairly and justly there would be more than enough for everyone. But that gets derailed when, like David, we lust after things that don't belong to us.

When we are not content with what is our fair share; when we long for things we are not entitled to claim as our own. When we insist on having our own way and trample on the interests of others; God's abundant provision becomes distorted. Innocent people suffer. They lose out to those who are able to wield power.

Parish communities can lose sight of their many blessings. They can become absorbed in a glass half full way of seeing the world concentrating on the negatives rather than a glass half full perspective that sees the many ways in which God has blessed them and provides for them.

Here at St Paul's for example we might well bewail all manner of thing we don't have while

overlooking what we have. We are blessed with a wonderful historic building, sitting on prime real estate in the centre of the city. What a gift! What a blessing!

Our Sunday worship involves an extensive liturgical team supported by an impressive cast of people who prepare the building; clean, dust, arrange flowers, open up; people who prepare the liturgy, practice and provide music, choose and accompany our hymn singing, read the lessons, prepare and lead the intercessions, staff kids time with God, greet people as they arrive, provide hospitality, pray for those who lead and those who will attend.

Worship is a community activity. You contribute to our worship by attending and participating. Your fellow parishioners are blessed by your presence as you are by theirs. Together we worship our God; giving thanks for all we have received, sharing with God our hopes and

aspirations and bring before God, our needs, the needs of our world and those who are near and dear to us.

Within this community of St Paul we have many groups doing wonderful things for the Lord. We have a team who prepare folk for the baptism of their children, parishioners involved in the Mother's Union group, the Anglican Men's Society, the Variety Market, the Support Centre, Music Box, hospital chaplaincy, the ministry to shut ins, the RI team, the nursing home team, the ground maintenance teams who mow, people who care for the grounds and gardens, and those who attend to the maintenance of the buildings.

We also have a ministry to the Sudanese community who fill this church of a Sunday and worship to the sound of drums and the Dinka language; Sudanese children are taught in Sunday School. This ministry is led by the five Sudanese clergy and a team of liturgical assistants.

All this is overseen by an enthusiastic group of wardens and parish councillors assisted by a very able admin team. Now I'm sure I have missed some vital activities and for that I apologize. I have not intentionally left anyone out and am not trying to provide a comprehensive list. More an indicative list to make the point that we are blessed with many wonderful people undertaking significant ministries in the life of this community.

To focus on what is not is to miss what is and the blessings that have been showered upon us. Please don't hear me saying that everything should remain exactly as it is forever and a day. It may well be that we need to restructure some of the things we do if we are to continue to be relevant to the needs of this community.

We have enormous potential and opportunity. We just need to hold onto that which is good and not allow ourselves to become unsettled by the

storms of life and the winds that threaten to blow us off course.

The Ephesians reading is a prayer for the outpouring of God's blessing on the people. It is full of effusive words that remind us of God's abundant provision for all people. An abundance we see in the feeding of the five thousand and the miracle at Cana in Galilee.

It serves as a reminder to us of the many blessings we receive from God and in particular of the blessings we have been given here at St Paul's Ipswich through the ministry of so many people.

Undoubtedly there are things that we are not doing that could be done, and there are things that we are doing that could be done better than they are; but to focus on those at the exclusion of what is being done is to see the world of St Paul's through a glass half empty instead of half full.

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