

One of the things I found difficult when I commenced training for the ministry, was that the church was not as I had imagined. My picture of what church was like had been formed by my experience of my local parish.

St David's Chelmer was a place where I felt accepted and where my talents and abilities were recognized and appreciated. During my training I often felt that I was not acceptable. That my talents and abilities were not appreciated.

At that time the church as I encountered it seemed full of dysfunctional human beings who manifested their humanity in ways I found to be unhelpful.

In the reading from the Book of Revelation we have John's vision of a New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem John saw represented a new world order under the reign of God.

Such a vision can seem far removed from the reality of our day to day life. The question we are then faced with is, "What are we to make of John's vision?"

- Is it a place we can expect to encounter the other side of death?
- Is it a model for the church and the world in which we live? Or
- was its sole purpose to inspire John and his contemporaries who were living under an oppressive regime?

The import of the vision for me is that the presence of God transformed the whole city. What this suggests to me is that while ever there is a gulf between John's vision of the New Heaven and the New Earth and the world as we know it, there is work to be done.

The vision I had of how the Church would be was somewhat naïve. It did however have glimpses of John's vision of the New Earth.

From time to time I glimpse something of John's vision in the lives of the men and women I encounter in the life of the Church and in the world more broadly.

As our gospel reading makes plain, Jesus was keen for his followers to act towards one another in a caring way. "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another" Jesus said.

When we take this seriously it transforms everything we say and do in relation to one another. To love the other is to want the best for them.

Wanting the best for the other commits us to work to create the best emotional and physical environment we possibly can.

What I think this means is that we work for an environment where we respect one another; appreciate the giftedness of each individual and where we use no more than our fair share of the world's resources.

Unfortunately as individuals and as members of society we often fall short of this ideal. In 2010 the General Synod of the Anglican Church in Australia (that's the church's parliament) referred to its Professional Standards Commission the task of developing a "clear statement of expected behavioural standards" for church members.

It had come to the attention of General Synod that "the bullying of clergy and church workers by lay members of the Church" was a significant issue.

A draft statement entitled “Being Together” was prepared by the Commission for “consideration and comment” by parish councils. Those of you who were on parish council at that time might remember discussing this document.

The parish council I was a part of noted that bullying is not a one way street. Clergy and church workers are just as capable of inappropriate behaviour as are lay members of the church.

The “Being Together” document says, “Jesus told us to love one another as he loves us. As Christians we know our life together is strengthened when our behaviour is consistent with our faith. However, our experience of being together can be difficult sometimes, particularly where there are differences. So it is important to be clear about what is loving behaviour towards each other.”

It states in part that in *“Being community:*

- We will seek the common good of the church, not just our own interests.
- We will encourage each other to participate in the life of the church.
- We will be aware of how our behaviour affects others.”

That in *“Relating to each other:*

- We will treat each other with respect and dignity, irrespective of ability, gender, sexuality, race, age or contribution to the church.
- We will act with integrity and honesty in our interactions with each other.”

In *“Communicating with each other:*

- We will communicate respectfully with others, and not in a way that threatens, belittles or humiliates.
- We will respect confidences, and refrain from speculation and gossip.”

When it comes to *“Acknowledging difference:*

- We will respect those who are different from us and not isolate or ridicule them.
- We will listen to and seek to understand the beliefs, opinions and practices of others, even when we do not share their views.”

And in *“Responding to conflict:*

- We will accept responsibility for our part in a conflict.
- We will be willing to play our part in resolving a conflict.”

General Synod was presented with a motion recommending that each diocese adopt “Being Together” as the statement of expectations regarding the behaviour of members of Church communities.

“Being Together” may well serve to assist the church to look afresh at Jesus’ command that we love one another.

No set of words however, however elegant or perceptive can change behaviour unless those words transform the hearts and minds of the membership.

One of the turning points for me in reframing my view of the church was to accept that my brothers and sisters in Christ were frail human beings like me.

I come as one in need of forgiveness. I come with vulnerabilities and weaknesses as well as strengths

and abilities. By recognizing that I need forgiveness, acceptance and respect and that others might be in need of the same I became more comfortable with myself and others.

It is good for us all to have visions of how we would like the church and the world to be. John's vision certainly sets the bar very high indeed. His was a vision of a city fit for the ruler of the world to inhabit.

It's a vision that encouraged the early Christians and continues to inspire people to work for a better world and to look to meet Jesus the other side of death.

As we strive to live into John's vision for the world we continue to embrace mechanisms that allow us to meet the challenges of the present while striving to attain the essence of John's vision.

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