

Dear friends

I have just finished looking at the readings for Sunday in order to start thinking about the sermon I am going to preach. The gospel account takes place at the very beginning of Christ's ministry and is John's account of the calling of the first disciples, first Andrew & Peter, then Philip and Nathaniel. As you will be aware, it wasn't long before he had gathered around him 12 main disciples plus countless others who followed him either permanently or came together from time to time. I wonder what it was like to have been there at the time, to have been not only in the presence of Jesus in human form, but also part of this incredible fellowship of believers. Something tells me that it would have been pretty amazing.

Well, this got me thinking. You probably won't be surprised to learn that as I go about the village I often meet people who tell me that they are Christian however they don't think it necessary to come to church – they are quite happy worshipping God in their own way and in their own time. I have often been told how people can experience the presence of God in a variety of different places and circumstances, while walking the dog in the countryside, strolling along a sandy beach, watching a beautiful sunset, looking out to the stars on a clear night or simply sitting quietly either at home or in church and saying their prayers. I certainly wouldn't be as presumptuous as to disagree – indeed I have also been in similar situations which have made me extremely aware of God's presence and where, in my own way and time, I have worshipped and given thanks to him. As you may be aware, I also sit quietly in church every morning – saying my prayers (which will always include various people and needs throughout the villages) and reading the Bible – and again, this is a very special time for me which I would encourage others to try and emulate on a regular basis.

However, God does not call us to come to him in isolation, far from it – he also calls us to come together as a corporate body. There are several reasons for this, for a start our worship will be much better and more uplifting than it can possibly be if our worship is only in private, we can encourage and feed off each other in our prayers and praises and we can remind ourselves, and openly acknowledge to God, that (and this is my pet piece of theology) we are made in his Trinitarian likeness – which is one of living in perfect love and community with each other.

But there is another aspect, each one of us has different gifts and abilities and we are called to use them for the benefit of God and his people. There are two sides to this statement – obviously the first is that if each of us concentrates on using our own individual gifts as well as we can for the sake of others we should find ourselves living and worshipping in a community that is as good as it possibly can be. The second point that is related to this is that when we join with others in community, we become aware that we don't have to do everything ourselves – there will be others around who can help and support us in so many ways, not just by enhancing our corporate worship but our whole lives as well. Worshipping in complete isolation can be just as lonely and demanding as living in isolation.

February sees the start of lent – the time when we think about Jesus being on his own with God in the wilderness in preparation for the start of his ministry. However, it's important to remember that although Jesus always recognised the importance of private prayer, his was a ministry that was carried out with others constantly alongside him.

If you are one of those people who believe that you don't need to regularly come to church in order to worship God please think again this lent. We have several different types of service and we would love for you to come and join us for one or more of them. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like to know more about being part of the body of the church.

With all good wishes for a very Blessed and worshipful February

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Hone".