

**Series - Community - No. 3 'Community as Formation'**

So far in this series we have looked at the Christian Community as family, as a gift, and now we consider Christian Community (church) as formation, namely why has God called us to join this particular eclectic mix of worshipping people? What is he expecting will be grown and formed as a result?

The New Testament introduces Jesus choosing the first eclectic mix, his disciples. *From what we know of the individual disciples, do you think they would have chosen each other to spend the next three challenging years together in close company?*

It is surely no surprise that 'God continually calls us to take steps that are just one degree beyond our current ability' (Charles Stanley). It is in those places that our faith is tested, and we really lean on God for support, and we grow spiritually. *Have you considered how that might be applied to the circle of people we mix with? Have you considered what we might learn from, what we might contribute to, those folk who differ in some way from us, that God has 'opportuned' to be beside us in church?* The diverse mixture of first disciples called by Jesus strongly suggests that he knew that diversity itself was an important building block in forming his 'family', a family that would demonstrate what a true worshipping community looks and feels like. *What relevance do you see for us as a church family?*

**Read John 15:1-12** Let us focus on the repeated use in this passage of the word 'remain'. We are to remain in Christ and he will remain in us. We must remain in the community that knows and loves Jesus and celebrates him as Lord. There's no such thing as a solitary Christian (Tom Wright). If we want to demonstrate our faith and bear fruit, we will need the support of all our church family. This is mutual support, give and take, to form the true worshipping community. Most of us find it easier to give help and less easy to ask for help, but this runs counter to the give and take model. *Consider how we can we make ourselves more open to help - to receive prayer, teaching, guidance and encouragements. Do we hold back from allowing our church family to help us?* We are blessed that, at St James, we have a strong 'giving' culture, both individually and collectively. *It would be foolish to think we have this exactly right – so how can we individually and collectively shape improvements?*

'Remain in my love (v9), and 'that joy may be complete' (v11). Living in harmony in any collective is not easy; be that school, work, club, family or church. It is generally accepted that all members make sacrifices for the sake of unity. However, that does not seem to be how Jesus expects his worshipping community to be. *How do we turn the minor irritations which are present in any church family into joy? How can we remain in Jesus' love?*

**Read 2 Peter 1: 3-11**

*What does this passage say about our subject?*

**Prayer:** *Lord, help me to be the encourager and builder of the church you want me to be.*