Mark 9.38-41; Numbers 11: 4-6, 10-16, 24-29 – *Dedication*

Sunday 30/09/18, 8.00 & 11.00am, Christ Church

I feel for Moses, I really do. I imagine him, the once mighty leader who’d defiantly raised his staff to Pharaoh, who’d been such a dedicated leader for so long, now with his back bowed to breaking point, bearing the weight of his people and their endless complaining (don’t like it here, don’t like the food, don’t like the weather) – and feeling the weight of God’s demands too. ‘God, I’ve had enough. I can do it no longer.’ Well, I’m so glad it’s not like that here; so thankful for everyone who abstains from moaning, who’ll say (if there’s a problem) how are we (not you) going to fix it? Or with an opportunity, how are we going to embrace it? That’s a lesson Moses had to learn, and I almost seem to hear God chuckling in answer to Moses’ complaint: ‘At last, Moses, you’ve finally realised you can’t do it any longer on your own. Share the load; share the blessing. You need 70 people to do your work. Choose them.’ (70 – that’s about the number we’ve got here today.) There’s something for everyone to do, and they can do it because I’ll give them my Holy Spirit,’ says God. It is a model for the church – one big team of people pulling together. Moses, in the end, said he wanted everyone to have the Spirit and everyone to prophesy. The New Testament affirms that all believers are given the Spirit, but that the Spirit equips with all different gifts, talents and abilities: everyone has a different role within the team.

Where this passage, and today’s Gospel, challenge us is over our human instinct to exclude people, often inadvertently, because they’re not part of our group, not ‘one of us’. Eldad and Medad were not with the others when the Spirit came; a non-disciple used Jesus name to drive out a demon: in each case someone tried to stop them. Moses said, Jesus said, don’t stop them. What they are doing is from God. Those who are not against us are with us. Within the church, it’s often said, ‘It’s the same old people doing everything.’ It’s not true. It mustn’t be true. No one is too new, or too old, to be part. There must be no cliques; no inner groups; no holding on to roles because ‘that’s what I do and it’s mine.’ It’s teamwork, an ever-evolving team. It’s true also between churches, who are never, ever, ‘the competition’! But we affirm our neighbours as part of the church of God, and we affirm each person in their belonging to the church that is right for them. Work together for the kingdom of God in our area. (This is why the Covenanting Churches is so important, not just as an organisation, but as a set of relationships.) Then there are other partnerships too: we work in relationship with our schools, with local charities, with NTC for Little Angels, and so on. It takes all the skills, energies, time, talents of all the people to actualise the kingdom of heaven in our midst, and our patience to work with one another’s idiosyncrasies.

As we come to give thanks and dedicate our anniversary legacy project, and I think of lovely verses from Exodus 35 tell of the making of the tabernacle where God would be worshipped: the contributions of fine materials and the gift of the Spirit to the workers: craftsmen, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers; workers in stone and wood; designers in gold, silver and bronze. We haven’t quite got that range of materials, but it has been a real team effort to get to this point. We want to give thanks for all the fund-raising during our anniversary year of 2016 under Margaret Boxall’s direction of the Steering Committee; for gifts given in memory of a number of individuals; for the grant provided by Ibstock Enova. We give thanks for the original design of the cupboards by Ron Foster; for the management of the project by Keith Watkins with support from Fabric and Finance; for the skill of Mick the Joiner and Tim the Glazier in turning plans into reality.

It may seem funny to dedicate a cupboard – even such a good quality cupboard – and some second hand glass. But these things are symbolic. It’s not just the showy things that we do that are dedicated to God. It’s not just the formal religion, the ceremony, the ritual. It’s also the hidden, the behind the scenes, the humble service. The glass is decorative, the light shining through reminding of the light of Christ refracted through our lives. And that it came from the Trescott chapel reminds us of geography – that our parish does extend out that far into Staffordshire – and of history, connecting us people gathered to worship there over many decades.

A cupboard exists for what it contains. In this case, the main contents is the equipment, costumes, props and scenery for Open the Book, our weekly telling of Bible stories in the Infant School. It’s the mission of the church to the young children of our area. So when we dedicate a cupboard, we rededicate that mission.

When we had our anniversary celebrations three years ago, we asked what the vision was for those behind its building. The vicar at the time spoke of ‘a church for all classes’. We use different language today, but it’s a vision of inclusivity that remains. The 1860s was possibly the biggest decade in church building in this country, perhaps ever; and much that we think of as ‘traditional church’ became established at that time: the idea of the building teaching Christian belief: for example, the three windows of the apse, each divided into three lancets, is there to remind you of the Holy Trinity. But more generally, it’s the feel of the building: that you get a mixture of awe and stillness when you enter; that your eye should be drawn forwards and upwards as your spirit is lifted to God. It is, as it were to allow God to get under your skin. As we dedicate wood and glass today, so we rededicate ourselves, together, to be people for whom God has got under the skin, and in unity, we want to radiate his presence in the world.