

Sermon Preached by the Right Reverend Jo Wells, Bishop of Dorking, at the Institution of the Reverend Jackie Richardson as Vicar – 20 March 2019

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (NRSV)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Today I caught one of my favourite moments of spring: the first smell of newly-mown grass. Winter is over: the season of growth is upon us. I was on my bike and I wanted to pause and just enjoy it.

And then I thought of you all in Hersham. Never mind Lent: I am guessing that this celebration of a new ministry might feel like the smell of newly mown grass. That it marks the end of winter at St Peter's, and the beginning of a new season for which you have been waiting: marked, we pray, by new life, new shoots, new ministry, new growth. There's something ever so reliable about spring – its coming is releasing and renewing – as well as a little chaotic. Because growth is unpredictable, growth is uneven, growth is chaotic sometimes. You don't control the change, yet it's all good. Oh how the smell of newly mown grass spurs us to pray and imagine!

Before I get carried away with spring, let's not fail to give thanks for the past season. I understand it's not been all winter at all, not least thanks to the ministry team, and Jonathan in particular. I confess I'm not sure I've ever known a church in vacancy so attentively ordered and organised.

And now to the new. The new season. The new vicar. Jackie, what a fantastic crowd are here to welcome you. There's no doubting that you somehow encapsulate the 'new' that is so eagerly awaited, with your combination of gifts and graces that the appointing committee discerned are just the right mix for St Peter's going forward. God has called you to be a priest here.

Now, let's be clear what you're coming to, and what you're here to offer. You – Jackie – are *not* the new ministry team. Here, this huge crowd, all these people sitting behind you, they make up your

ministry team, together offering a combination of gifts are graces that the Spirit has discerned are just the right mix for the this wonderful church going forward so that, in the words of our shared vision, it is a transforming church, transforming lives. And your job as priest is to coordinate the priesthood of this whole church community.

All around you, everyone here, embodies the message of 1 Cor 12: illustrating the variety of God's gifts to his people, offering the variety of forms of service, sharing the varieties of activities – recognising the same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God who activates us all to belong together and work together for the common good. Your role, Jackie, is NOT to run around offering all those forms of service, leading – even just sharing - in all the variety of activities. The Spirit is so generous with his gifts, with the variety, with the opportunities, with the possibilities that you'd go bonkers. Either you'd be dizzy or you'd be dead. There are 17,000 people in this parish!

But more importantly, you'd be missing something, and this community would be impoverished.

Listen again to what Paul writes to the Corinthians, and how I think he might say it afresh tonight if he was addressing his first letter ch 12 to the Hershmites: there are varieties and diversities and multiplicities of gifts and talents, more than you can count, given to every single child of God in this place. Because the Spirit gives abundantly to his people, to all of them and every single one of them. There is no shortage, no scarcity, only abundance, when it comes to God's gifts to God's people because no one is omitted, and they do not run out, the Spirit gives to all. The Spirit has given St Peter's everything it need to follow Jesus and to serve the common good. Everything.

Paul might continue: To some are given through the Spirit particular responsibility in local schools, in local businesses, yes even at the golf club; to others are given by the same Spirit a remarkable capacity to connect and relate across the whole community; to others, musical gifts for sharing in worship and cake-making gifts for hospitality; and to others the initiative to dream up picnics for teddy bears, all by the one Spirit. To some are given healing gifts that help the elderly find health and hope; to others are given skills for the redevelopment of the church and churchyard, whether with money or with bricks. Each is a manifestation of the same Spirit, who allots to every single one an abundance of gifts and possibilities, given for the common good.

So what is your role as priest in this community, Jackie? Here's where I want to leave you with, a gift tonight. Here it is. It's a cane. It's not posh and white like the professionals wield, but here it is, a conductor's cane. It's for conducting the orchestra at St Peter's. Your task is not to play every instrument – you don't even have to know how to play - but to encourage their playing, individually and together, sometimes to choose the music, perhaps to set rehearsals, usually to conduct their playing - so that this orchestra can make music and that music can be shared. So that it can bless the community all around, with the evidence of all that the Spirit gives, with the beauty that is reflected from God. Pray God, not just offering its music inside the church but on the streets, in the nursing homes, at the newsagent, in the pub.

Amen.