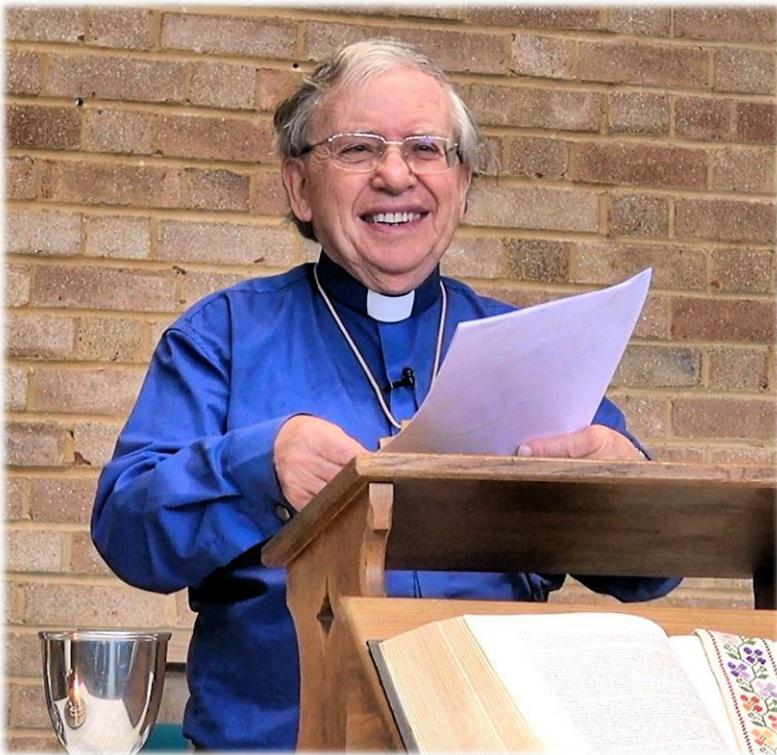


Communion Service Sunday 18th January – led by Revd. David Aplin.



Well one of this week's lectionary readings answered a few of David Ramsay's questions from last week. John was baptising people at Bethany. And although they were cousins and might well have grown up together, John had not seen anything special about Jesus until God told him specifically that he would see the Spirit come down on him at Bethany.

David's sermon focused on 1 Corinthians 1 **"He will strengthen you to the end"**.

Paul had written, "I give thanks to my God, always, for you, because of the grace of God that has been given to you in Christ Jesus." In every way, we have been enriched in Him—both in speech and in knowledge of every kind. The testimony of Christ has been strengthened among

us, so that we are not lacking in any spiritual gifts as we await the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In modern times, David thought, society often chased after celebrity—sometimes fleeting, sometimes pursued endlessly, especially through social media, where thousands or even hundreds of thousands of 'likes' could be amassed. But what did this really mean? What was true worth?

It was tempting to look back wistfully and claim that things were better in the past, but the allure of celebrity always brought power. Celebrity could open doors, but it could also blind people, close their ears, and numb their consciences. History gave us sobering examples of how fame and money, mixed with arrogance, had led people astray, and how society had sometimes turned a blind eye to wrongdoing, even within the Church. So, should we strive after fame, fortune, and power? Were these the true measures of our worth?

David had donned his 53rd Wedding Anniversary "suit" to transport us to a pub restaurant in Devon, where he and his wife had celebrated the day with his family. He'd made it clear to the publican that, although his

daughter had organised it, he was the one paying. And told he must be a millionaire, he'd responded that having the love of his family, a marriage that had lasted over fifty years, and a life filled with joy, were the true riches.

He told us about a recent act of kindness made whilst preaching, noting that such moments of kindness and welcome were not about credit or recognition, but about living as Christians—giving of ourselves and caring for others. Kindness and love, both given and received, were central to the Christian life.

The Bible told us that we were enriched in speech—not merely because we could speak, but because we could



use words for kindness, for sharing knowledge, and for making a difference. We were called to speak out bravely against injustice and to proclaim the truth of God and Jesus Christ. This was the responsibility of all Christians. We were also enriched in knowledge. As humans, we were created to learn and progress, whether in medicine, psychology, or even pure mathematics – reflecting God’s intention for us to keep moving forward in understanding and wisdom.

David’s journey had taken him to different congregations, different roles, with each new challenge helping him grow. Even when churches had closed or circumstances changed, God had equipped him with the gifts needed for new paths. He talked about the practice of repeating sermons (not for him!) noting that each reading of Scripture could reveal new meaning, shaped by where we were in life and what God was calling us to hear in that moment.

Paul had also written: “He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the partnership of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

And David had often witnessed people approaching death with a remarkable sense of peace. Even after long illness or suffering, there was a transformation—a readiness and calm that came from knowing God’s presence. He recalled with deep emotion how his own family members, and many others, had experienced this peace at the end of their lives. The Lord prepared them, held them, and welcomed them into His arms. He, too, had known a near death moment when he had been ready to follow that path, confident that at its end, he would meet our Lord.

We did not need to fear death or the next life, for God was faithful and would strengthen us to the very end. Our Lord was with us, offering strength, care, and love, and welcoming us home.