Next Saturday our PCCs will gather for an Away Day
to think together about the future – about what the Church is,
and about how God may be calling us to be such a church.

As it happens, organised not by us but by God
in his goodness,
our passage today addresses these two questions:
the most important characteristic of a healthy church,
and how *we* can become such a church.

First of all, the most important characteristic
of a healthy church.

For the apostle Paul, the answer is clear.
It comes twice in v.2,
where he calls the Philippian church to be like-minded,
to have the same love, to be one in spirit, and,
and here it is again, to be of one mind.
To be *like-minded* is, for Paul,
the key characteristic of a healthy church.

This does not simply mean that its members
are to have the same understanding,
to *think* the same way as one another.
It means much more than this.
It means to have the same commitment
to that which is most important,
and to *feel* the same way about it.

Think of a world-renowned orchestra.
What makes its members play so well together?
It's not just that they all know the notes;
it's that they all feel the music the same way;
that they have a shared commitment
to playing the music as beautifully and as meaningfully
as they possibly can;
that nothing is more important to them than this.

For the members of a healthy church,
being like-minded, of one mind,
is not just believing the same things,
having a shared understanding of the Christian message.
Look at v.1: it's that they have a shared commitment to,
and a shared joy in,
the encouragement they have from being united with Christ,
a shared commitment to and joy in the comfort of his love,
a shared commitment to, a shared joy that comes from
their common sharing in the Spirit;
it's that there is nothing more important to them
than their shared commitment to and joy in
the Christian message and all that it means.

And how does this like-mindedness,
this shared commitment, lead to a healthy church?
Look at our orchestra again.

What makes them play so well together
is that their shared commitment means
that there is no place for selfish ambition or vain conceit:
the first clarinettist, with a solo to play,
regards the second cellos in the back row
as just as important as herself;
the first violins value the viola players,
and play in such a way that the violas can be heard
and appreciated.

And a healthy church?
Well, vv.3-4 show us that like-mindedness,
shared commitment to what is most important,
means that nothing is done out of selfish ambition
or vain conceit.
Rather, in humility, its members value others
above themselves,
not looking to their own interests
but to the interests of others.

The vicar of a church Ros and I once attended
used to say that he would know
his church had understood what it means to be a church
when the elderly retirees came to him saying
that there should be more modern music in the services
to encourage the young,
and when the youth group came to him saying
that there should be more traditional hymns
to encourage the elderly.

Not looking to their own interests
but to the interests of others.
Like-mindedness: a shared commitment to and joy in
the message of the love of God in Jesus Christ,
and all that that means.

So, secondly,
how can a church become a church such as this?
And the answer? It comes in v.5:
by being like-minded with Jesus;
having the same mindset as Christ Jesus.
And what was Jesus' mindset?

Before we answer that question, pause for a moment.
Remember who Jesus is:
he is God incarnate, God come to earth in human form
so that we can know what God is like.
'Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,'
Jesus once said to his followers.
'I and the Father are one.'
So, when we ask, What is Jesus' mindset?'
we are asking, 'What is God like?
What is the deepest reality in the heart of God?
And once we see what it is we are asking,
the answer becomes truly astonishing.
Because the answer is vv.3-4.
What was Jesus' mindset?
What is the mindset of God himself?
Jesus' mindset was in humility to value others above himself;
to look not to his own interests but to the interests of others.

‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.’
Humble service of others lies at the very heart of God’s heart;
self-sacrificial commitment to the salvation of others
is the deepest reality in the heart of God.

Humble service of others: look at vv.6 and 7.
Jesus was in very nature God himself.
In him all the fullness of almighty God dwelt bodily.
And yet, he did not consider equality with God
something to be used to his own advantage.
Instead, the very opposite:
in taking human form, he made himself nothing;
literally, he emptied himself,
taking instead the very nature of a servant, a slave,
come for one reason only – not to *be* served but to *serve*.
Humble service of others – this is God’s heart.

But more than that:
self-sacrificial commitment to the salvation of others
was the very beating of his heart, v.8.
For, being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death –
even death on a cross.
The one whose name is above every name, v.9,
came from the highest place to the very lowest place –
from the glory of God to being a human being.
And not just a human being,
but the lowest human being - a slave.
And not just to die, but to die a slave’s death -
the most humiliating, the most degrading death
it was possible to die at that time – death on a cross.

And why?
In self-sacrificial commitment to the salvation of others.
He took the sins of all those
who would ever put their trust in him upon himself,
and bore them on the tree, the cross,
taking the full penalty for every sin,
so that those who would believe in him
need not have to do so.
From the very highest to the very lowest.
From rejoicing in the eternal love of God,
to bearing the full extent of the wrath of God.
He came not to be served but to serve,
and to give his life as a ransom for many.

How is a church to be a church?
By having the same mindset as Christ Jesus.
By sharing in his humble service of others,
his self-sacrificial commitment to the salvation of others.
But how are people like us to become people like this?
There is only one way.
By telling ourselves, reminding ourselves,
over and over and over again,
that this is our God.
By filling our minds with the reality of who this God is,
of what lies at the centre of God’s heart –
a humble, servant-hearted, self-sacrificial devotion
to the salvation of his people.
To be like Christ we must have the mind of Christ.

Charles Spurgeon, regarded as the greatest preacher
of the 19th Century wrote,
‘The victorious power of Christianity lies in
the continual contemplation of Christ’s death for me.’
‘The victorious power of Christianity lies
in the continual contemplation of Christ’s death for me.’
It is by being like Jesus, like-minded with Jesus,
that the church will become the church Jesus died to save.