KIRKCALDY

MAP 7th September, 2014

So what makes a successful congregation?

That’s a dangerous question – and a difficult one too. When I began to think about it, the list started to get uncomfortably long.

Obviously a community of prayer – a community that listens to God. And great leadership – a Rector who is a gifted leader, hard-working, prayerful and everything else you can think of. And people who are deeply-committed and ready to serve and to share their faith. And a good building that helps the community to be a place of welcome. And money – that helps too

And so the list goes on and on.

The readings today offer a few pointers of their own – particularly the gospel reading. It’s about how the church manages relationships and conflict – for every community that has people will have conflict. And every community that has passionately-committed people will have conflict. What matters is how the conflicts are resolved. That’s because – as Jesus says – ‘where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them’ It’s in the meeting of people at the deepest level that the presence of the risen Christ is discerned and experienced.

Today we mark 3 years since the launch of your Mission Action Plan. I came down during the week and we shared a meal together – one of the marks of the church – welcome and hospitality. And we talked together about the journey which you have been on in this remarkable congregation.

I went away thinking about what Bill said – that the Prayer Group is the powerhouse of this congregation. We could have talked some more about that – how it means that the congregation is plugged into the need to discern God’s will for us – how people are prepared to listen to and to serve one another. And I think that it probably meant that a congregation without that Prayer Group would somehow be a flat place

And I went away thinking about our conversation – you had set out to focus on three of the Nine Marks of Mission

* Transformed lives and communities through receiving the good news of Jesus Christ
* Lifelong nurture, deeping the knowledge of God in our lives
* Sharing faith by confident and sensitive evangelism – witnessing to God’s presence and power

You tried all sorts of things – and not all of them were easy or worked out in the way you hoped. But that didn’t seem to make the slightest difference – other things happened and the congregation made progress. I think that a determination to face outwards in this way is also one of the powerhouses of a congregation.

I spent an interesting morning on Friday with clergy from many churches in Glasgow – invited along with the Moderator and Bishop Joe of Paisley. I wrote afterwards in my blog that they were animated – animated by their relationships. Over and over again they talked about friendships which made work together possible.

And that is true here – friendship; mutual respect; fun together. Relationship is the heart – where two or three are gathered together