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Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : January 23rd, 2022  
“Epiphany 3”

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**EPIPHANY 3 2022 – 23 JANUARY 2022**

I have long wondered what Jesus was really like. I have always thought of him, as a person, to be something of a mystery man. We know well the surroundings of his birth, his suffering and his death and his rising again. We know something of his 3-year travelling ministry of teaching and healing. But we don't, I feel, really know him. What did he look like? What was his personality like? Was he a dominant, larger than life extrovert or was he more a quieter and reflective introvert? We just do not know.

What we do know is that he was very well thought by the people as well as by God. A couple of weeks ago we reflected upon the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and the proclamation by God “You are my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased.” And remember that this affirmation is before Jesus has done anything except spending his years making tables and chairs in his dad's shop, and watching and waiting for the right time. Yet still God knew him and was pleased with him. Then this morning we read in the gospel: *“Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone”*. He was praised by everyone. That is surely no mean feat,

particularly given that he was teaching in the Jewish synagogues to a Jewish audience his new gospel of God's love and forgiveness offered to all, a message which would have been quite startling and revolutionary to his hearers.

Now one of the things I also wonder is the extent to which Jesus might have used humour in his teaching? It wouldn't be appropriate for me to generalise the answer, but there is no doubt that the Jewish people have long been known for their sense of humour – in the same way perhaps that Jewish language, food, literature, music are all remarkably distinctive. In recent times it was Rabbi Lionel Blue who achieved great popularity because of the way he used humour in his morning 'Thought for the Day'.

But Jews have seen the humour in their lives for a very long time. The Bible itself recounts how Sarah laughed when told she'd have a child, and Isaac is named for that laughter. There is an old Jewish saying that goes 'If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans'. Consider the implications of a Creator God with a sense of humour!

So, I would suggest that a sense of humour would have been an important characteristic for Jesus to have possessed. And this is not just confined to Jesus. Hopefully his disciples could see the funny side of things and were not always serious. That goes on to extend to the Christian Church today. Peruse the Church Times adverts for vacancies and almost all will specify that the prospective Vicar should possess a good sense of humour – but surely that should extend to every human being, not least to us who are part of a church community. The ability to laugh – often at ourselves – is undoubtedly a good and humbling

characteristic to possess. All Saints Haggerston in the East End of London is known as the Clown's Church – and a former Clown's Chaplain I knew used to take great delight in stressing the huge similarities that exist between priests and clowns. It is said that laughter is the best medicine!

For us at Christ Church it is often the children that delight us and cause laughter – like 10-year-old Robin Coulber did the other week when he got me to choose quite at random some numbers and letters from the chatterbox that he had made – and the laughter that resounded from you all when he solemnly proclaimed to me 'God loves you even if you are naughty' – echoing one of my infant school reports I had just shared with you in my sermon – was palpable and refreshing for us all to enjoy.

As a Vicar I have long enjoyed programmes such as Rev or the Vicar of Dibley, poking gentle fun at the church – and long may that continue. As an aside one of my favourite moments recently was when listening to the popular Radio 4 panel show 'I'm sorry I haven't a clue', one of my favourites. In one round they had to complete the wording on a greetings card. There was a 'missing you from church' card – and it went like this:

*"We want to let you know that we've not seen you for a while. We've noticed that you've not been here, we've missed your friendly smile. We think of you so very much, you're in our Sundays prayer.....and was completed by the panel member with 'But you are the flipping Vicar so you really should be there'. Sorry, I couldn't resist telling you that punchline – much better than the actual ending on the card which ran 'We hope that you'll come back into the fellowship we share'.*

But I digress. I think what I am trying to say this morning is that the one body of Christ to which we all belong has room for everyone – and for every different kind of person. Extrovert, introvert, quiet and shy, brash and loud. There is room for all. From its beginning, the Church has always been a body of people, rich in its diversity of types and gifts, and strong when it recognises its unity in Christ. When as a body we can be open and receptive, the life of Christ in us can speak out love and truth to the world. That is why what we can do together with Christians from other denominations is crucially important, particularly in this the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

When Jesus went to teach at his local synagogue, whether he used humour or not, it is clear that everyone who heard him praised him. For Jesus was giving them a very strong clue about who he really was – yes, the carpenter's son really was amongst them as the promised Messiah – and he was offering them new life under God.

One final thought – in our first reading it is stressed how many different types of people make up a church – and Paul uses the analogy of the body of a human being. Each one of us here has something to offer, to give to God for the building up of the body of Christ – so that the church here on earth may flourish and grow in unity of spirit. And do note carefully that this 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Paul's letter to the Church at Corinth was immediately followed by the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter on love which ends with this verse: *“three things remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*