

As most of you know, our church has just received a gold award as an Eco church – the 50th in the country and the first in our diocese of Oxford. As an eco church we take recycling seriously. So we recycle paper, pens, bottle tops, blister packs and so on, not only to reduce the amount of rubbish that goes into landfill, but to re use material so that we waste less; not extracting more from the earth than is sustainable. With recycling nothing is wasted

Back in the day people didn't talk about recycling. They spoke about make do and mend. When resources are limited that's what we do. When I was very young there was still rationing and things were hard to get, so I remember my Dad making rag rugs from any scraps of used material he could get hold of. One of our neighbours still does this, but as a hobby (*show rug*). This is one she is in the process of making. It's about taking scraps that are of little use on their own, but together can be woven into something useful and attractive. Nothing is wasted.

For us to make do and mend and take recycling seriously requires a change of mind and heart because with greater prosperity we've grown used to it being easier to discard something old or that we're tired of than to recycle it in some way.

In a church it's not just things that get recycled, but also us! For God is a great recycler, and fortunately he doesn't discard us if we are old, or he's tired of us, or we're flawed. Recycling is a divine activity. because, God is a great recycler. And we can see Jesus at work recycling in our gospels, taking those disciples, rough hewn, as one of our prayers puts it, fisherman, some with dodgy pasts, and shaping them not just as individuals but as a group of people who could eventually do what he did, as we see in our gospel reading – going out , sharing good news, healing, driving out demons, living out the reality of what life would be like if God was in charge (the 'kingdom of God'). Jesus didn't give up on any of them, even Judas.

If recycling *stuff* requires a change of heart and mind, so does allowing ourselves to be recycled. We might be like the family and friends of Jesus in Nazareth, feeling so familiar with church, with the Christian faith, that we can't see that there are still new things to be discovered.

Or perhaps we carry luggage in our lives that is hard to put down – things we did in the past or still do of which we feel ashamed. Or things done to us that leave us feeling we are not worth much. Why would God want to recycle someone like us? Or are we too young, or too old? Another fear might be that if God did recycle us we might not like the end result. Might he want us to do something we don't like? Can we trust this God?

But we can come just as we are, just like those first disciples. Jesus didn't wait for them to be equipped. They learnt the walk by doing it. And, most importantly, not just by being with Jesus, but by being with each other. We're recycled by being with Jesus *and* by being with each other. In other words, in our church.

Our church is rather like this rag rug- made up of many different bits of material, some old, some new, some faded, some fraying at the edges and so on. As each piece is woven in a shape begins to emerge. Our individual recycling contributes to the overall pattern of a community that has something useful, even life giving to offer our world.

As you can see (*pointing to the rag rug*) the rug isn't finished. My neighbour still has work to do and it will take her some time to do it. It's the same with us as individuals and as a church; we're all in the process of being recycled and God is in no hurry. God goes at our pace, gently inviting us to allow him to complete that work in us.

Christine Bainbridge