



Hello All,

So this September marks 5 years of being your vicar here in these parishes. The time has flown by probably because it has been so busy. It is natural, I suppose, to look back over the last 5 years and wonder whether my being here has made any difference to anybody. Has it done anything to build God's Kingdom here; has my presence helped to bring anyone into a deeper or closer relationship with God, themselves or each other?

I often go on in this newsletter about the importance of community: about how we should keep trying to make each other's lives better by joining in and getting to know one another better; to take time to help and to serve one another. I am sure it would have happened without this "hobby horse" of mine, but I would like to share with you one such act of community which happened recently in Skirlaugh.

A man called John Claxton, who lived in the sheltered housing at Poplar Close in Skirlaugh, sadly died. He had never had much and had no close family. Most people will have seen John, with his long hair and beard, walking between North and South Skirlaugh on the A165: he was always out and about. When news of John's death got around people started asking me if I knew anything about the funeral. I made some enquires and it seemed that John would receive a welfare funeral paid for by the council. This caused a large degree of upset in the village with many expressing their concern that John should be given a better send off than a Pauper's funeral and one or two people in the village agreed and thought the required funds could be raised. So, I made some further inquiries of the Coroner, the Council and the Registrar. This was something new to them, that a community would come together in this way, but the powers that be agreed that we could. When I contacted the Diocese to seek permission to waive the church fees they said that "It sounds like a situation where the goodness of humanity and a strength of community life is really coming together and the church should play its part". So after registering the death and making the funeral arrangements the funeral took place; with around 60 people in attendance, David Diable and others sharing their memories, followed by a gathering in the Sun Inn with food supplied by the residents of Poplar Close. A collection from church and village amounting to £446 which added to by donations from 2 other individuals paid the rest of the funeral costs.

This event showed an amazing outpouring and love from a community to someone who could have been seen as an outsider: someone to ignore or avoid. When I spoke in church I said how this village had, in this act, not only served John and their village but also had served Jesus in the most profound of ways. *"When I needed a neighbour were you there"!*

I hope you all had a great summer but now we turn our thoughts to the Harvest Season. Each of the churches is offering Harvest Festival services and it would be great to see you at one of them. This is an opportunity to give

thanks for all that we have: not just the food on our plates but also for our material wealth, our physical health, our spiritual wellbeing, the wonderful environment we live in and, probably most important of all, the relationships we have with friends and family. You would all be very welcome at any of the services.

Yours in Christ,

Revd Andy Simpson