

What is St Catharine's? Who is St Catharine's

The facetious answer would be to say that she was an Alexandrian princess, who after four years of missionary work was martyred by emperor Maxentius in AD304 by decapitation; Maxentius had planned to execute her with a breaking wheel but this shattered at her touch.

Except, of course, I was not thinking of her. This discussion "what is the church?" is called ecclesiology by people who want to demonstrate their intellect, and it's been going on for a long time. The Greek word that we translate to 'church' is 'ekklesia', and literally means 'congregation' or 'gathering'.

So the church is the people who meet. St Catharine's church therefore is the people who gather in the building, but is that all there is to it?

Do we think that anyone who gathers in the church building is part of the church? If someone can't get to the building any longer, do they cease to be part of the church? What does it mean to be part of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12)?

Clearly just understanding the church to be those who meet in a specific building leaves us with a number of problems. There must be something more that makes us part of the church, something we share. In some churches this is very clear, there is a clearly established orthodoxy, the church prescribes what is true and not easily accept deviation from that truth. St Catharine's church is not like this. Much like the Anglican Communion in general, there is a range of belief on almost any topic. We do have our shared vision, (which I know you all know off-by-heart, but just in case it's "serving Jesus today"), but have you noticed how flexible this is? What it means to serve Jesus is not defined for us in St Catharine's, we are each given space to find *how* we can serve.

This is for me is the 'what' and 'who' of St Catharine's. It is a community of believers, believers in Jesus, who all recognise that our primary purpose is to serve Him, the creator and perfecter of our faith. The challenge facing St Catharine's is that we often miss understand each other, that, because we approach Jesus from such differing places, we misconstrue the service we offer. The New Testament epistles make it clear that from the outset, the Church was struggling to stay unified in the face of individuals or factions trying to push their own mission, their own agenda, onto others. The relationships that had bound the early church together began to break down and the action needed could be uncomfortable at best.

The role of our leaders in the church is to bind our diverging senses of service and calling into one mission, to conduct the orchestra. That is, perhaps, a useful metaphor for St Catharine's today. Without the conductor the musicians are still all able to play, to take their lead from first violin and piano, but each must work harder at listening to ensure the individuals remain as one.

This is St Catharine's, people, united by the Holy Spirit, called to this corner of Gloucester and sent to out to serve Jesus. The days ahead will be exciting, and sometimes discordant notes will ring, but the head of the body is Christ, and his name *will* be glorified.