**Sermon** Anyone who’s ever grown a clematis will know that unless the small young plant is given plenty of tending and nurturing it will rapidly become a tangled mess. The one I’m growing in my garden at the moment against a south facing fence, is behaving rather erratically – one day it looks thirsty and a bit wilty, the next it’s springing into life. It has temperamental watering requirements, and on the days when the young stems grow rapidly they tangle themselves up with those little green but very stubborn curly shoots, so I’ve already found myself sitting down in front of it on several occasions trying to disentangle it and steer the shoots and stems in the right direction. I’m trying to cover a very long fence and it looks as though it’s going to take far longer than I’d hoped. I’d perhaps rather unrealistically thought that by planting two of the of the same spieces a little distance apart, I could cover the fence with one great splash of colour by the end of summer - but no such luck: the second one rather sadly withered into a brown clump of twigs. And if I don’t give the one which is thriving plenty of time and attention, it has a mind all of its own.

And in a way this is a little bit like our church life – my healthy clematis that is, not the withered one! We need to give time and attention to our spiritual health otherwise we run the risk of having a mind of our own, and not letting God take us where He wants to lead us. We’ve all been ‘planted’ if you like, in our contexts, in our communities, whether we’ve been here for all of our lifetime or whether we’ve arrived here at a later time in our lives. As we heard from our gospel reading, all of us can be a little like that small seed, initially hidden underground and reliant on God’s miracle of life in order for it to grow. Our growth, our spiritual growth, is dependent on how we, like the seed, are able and willing to trust God’s working in us and through us. To be the people and the church of God’s creation, we need to be open to His way of working and His nurturing, so that we don’t become like my tangled up clematis, with a mind all of its own.

Like the variety of clematis at the garden centre, we’re all different specimens of the same root – the root that is God – all of us made in his image and all of us made in order to love and serve him. All of us then are uniquely made, with our own particular characteristics and personalities, and all of us called to become the person that God wants us to be. One of the most exciting things for me in church life is seeing people grow and flourish into becoming that person that God has called them to become. Sometimes that can take a long time, but it doesn’t always: once we recognise this calling for ourselves, we’re released from trying to fit into any kind of mold, or of trying to fit in with what others think we should be or could be. It’s a common misconception in our vulnerability as humans - and I think a common misconception from those outside the church looking in, that somehow we need to fit in and become a certain kind of person to be a part of the church. How wrong that view is. I’m certain that that’s not the kind of church or community that God intended.

It can be something of a lightbulb moment when we realise that whoever we are, however we are, however different or similar we may feel to others, none of that matters one little bit: each and every one of us is God’s unique creation, called to be the person God wants us to be. The church, then, once released from the misconception of cloning, has the capacity to become a rich and diverse community of believers, each with their own unique gifts, personalities and characteristics. A few days ago I caught the end of Rev Dr Sam Wells talking about ‘mission and ministry’ on Thought for the Day. His version of mission was not primarily about telling people about Jesus, but instead about enabling, welcoming, including, and encouraging, so that absolutely everyone is given an opportunity to flourish. No-one is ever pigeon holed into doing things in a way which doesn’t help them become the person God calls them to be. And the can be that church becomes a place where everybody in the community finds their true home and their place in God’s created order.

Often though, this kind of unlimited, unleashed and uninhibited attitude to person centred flourishing presents us with some risks. Most of us are rather English; we’re not generally comfortable with risk – we tend to like things to be predictable, ordered, clean and tidy. The problem is if we get stuck at that point of tidiness and neatness and predictability in worship it can hinder us to a place of limitation of not just ourselves but others also. Ultimately it inhibits the possibilities for God to bring out the full potential of His people. When I was young I had a poster on my bedroom door – I’m sure you’ll have seen it somewhere as it’s quite well known. It’s a photograph of a large bird with outstretched wings, and the caption is ‘they can because they think they can’ and when I was very young I found that quite inspiring. As I grew a little older I found it harder to hold on to that notion, and my initial teenage years were spent in worry and under confidence. It was difficult to believe that all things were possible. And then one day I discovered Paul’s letter to the Philippians and that wonderful verse ‘I can do all things through him who gives me strength’, and it was this discovery of strength and trust in God, which had nothing whatsoever to do with the rather unreliable adults around me at that time, that got me through some very difficult years.

Once we see a glimmer of something different, or challenging, or exciting, and begin to see that God is bigger than all of our human limitations, we begin to see the potential which God sees within us and the world starts to look like a very different kind of place. Our journey of flourishing and finding our unique way in God’s limitless and uninhibited creation can begin, whatever age we are, whatever stage we’re at.

To illustrate this a little further, I’d like to talk briefly about the bumble bee. I’ve recently discovered that the bumble bee is not supposed to be able to fly, aerodynamically speaking. The bumble bee itself is apparently unaware of this, and so it just flies anyway – a little bit like the large bird on the poster on my bedroom door. It just does it, seemingly effortlessly. I think we can learn quite a lot from the bumble bee with its extraordinary disinhibition and trust in something which shouldn’t really be possible. How often are we inhibited and limited in what we do either because we’re not willing to just give something a go and see what happens, or worse still we’re worried about what someone else might think of us. How might our inhibition and avoidance of risk be limiting God’s mission here and now?

This morning at Holy Trinity we had a great example of giving something a go – 26 people from the congregation took a risk and had signed themselves up to doing something in church that they’d not done at Holy Trinity before; I for one enjoyed myself tremendously and I hope everyone else did too. But the purpose of this wasn’t just to have a good time and to give others who always do the jobs a rest (as important as that is) – but to offer ourselves to a task in a new way, thereby unearthing talents, gifts and skills, potential if you like, which had hitherto perhaps been rather hidden. At its creation, the bumble bee took a risk, and took off in flight, trusting itself to the air, the skies and the wind. Our lives – and the world as a whole – would be a very different place if the [bees](http://www.onegreenplanet.org/lifestyle/what-to-plant-in-your-garden-to-help-save-the-bees/) hadn’t taken that risk. We might remind ourselves that the bees are today responsible for pollinating about a sixth of the flowers worldwide and hundreds of our agricultural plants. They’re also some of the hardest working creatures on the planet, and so we owe much – may be even our very lives - to this amazing little insect.

The gospel parable we heard reminds us that the kingdom of God is like a seed, beginning underground, tiny and vulnerable, but bit by bit sprouts and grows until it flourishes into ripe heads of grain and is ready to harvest. And this can be easily likened to us – we don’t need to fully understand our theology, or ourselves, and we don’t need to fully comprehend the whys and the wherefores, but we do need to trust God. The seed is really at God’s mercy – reliant on several other things in the created order so that it can grow and flourish into a strong plant. Unlike the seed, we have choices and we have options about how we live – and many cry out for change and transformation in our communities and in our churches. Unless we’re prepared to take risks, step on in faith and put our very lives on the line for the sake of the kingdom of God, then how will the next generation and generations to come ever know about their potential, their flourishing, and the fullness of life to which God surely calls them, as he has called each and every one of us. We have to take risks for growth and flourishing to happen and for creation to develop well.

May be sometimes we need to recognise that we all have a tendency to be a little bit like Job – doubting, discouraged, despairing for the future. When we ponder the later chapters of the book of Job, when God addresses him directly and reminds him of the awesomeness of the created order, we are brought up short. The intricacies of creation, God’s love, care, and attention in extraordinary detail and depth remind us of the intricacies of ourselves and the potential that lies within. We are powerful creatures, God’s agents in the world, and unless we’re prepared to sometimes try and face what may seem impossible by taking risks and embracing challenge, how can we ever expect the world around us to transform into something safer, something more sustainable and something amazing beyond our human imagination? As the tiny seed underground is abandoned to the miracles of God’s rain, light, and warmth, so might we abandon ourselves to God’s will in each of us and trust that as we step out in faith, being prepared to take risks in our mission and ministry, we in turn allow the church of God to achieve her full potential.

The voice of your conscience, and the urgings of your heart are supremely important; when you dream of great things, don’t dismiss them as daydreams. They are the promptings of your soul, which knows better than your conscious mind what you can truly achieve. In this way we can become the unique creation God has called us to be.