

24<sup>th</sup> November 2021

## Counting

**“The scribe trained in counting is deficient in clay.  
The scribe skilled with clay is deficient in counting.”**

*Sumerian Proverb*

I'm not Sumerian, so I don't get all the symbolism in the proverb above. But it seems to be indicating a case for “each to their own”. Some are good with clay, some in counting, but it's rare that someone – a scribe or anyone else, for that matter – is good at everything.

I studied maths in university for my first degree. All my life I've counted steps as I climb stairs, or floors as I go up or down in a lift. It's part of me. Recently I came across a “jotter” of Arithmetic Tests from Primary School – when I was ten. Three things struck me: a) how neat it is (what happened there, I wonder?); b) some of it's done in fountain pen (and smudged as proof); c) I got some of the tests wrong (so, not perfect, eh?) But clearly, numbers and me have gone together since childhood.

For lots of reasons, we've all to be reasonably proficient at counting. Some are better than others, of course. We can't all be good at everything as the Sumerians remind us. But we all have to count sometimes ...

But why are we so exercised about numbers in our Church life? Age profiles ... social demographics ... baptisms ... Sunday Schools ... worshippers ... membership ... Oh, I know there are a lot of issues at play in Church structures nowadays, and there's not enough space here to elaborate on all of those. But I do get anxious when I hear about the Church's obsession with numbers. “It's not what it was like in my younger day – a full church and a burgeoning Sunday School. Where are the numbers now?” In your obsessive mind, I could reply.

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus is recorded as having said:

*When two or three are gathered together in My name,  
I am there in the midst of them.*

In our Church life, we are called to be faithful and not successful, to believe that Christ's presence isn't determined by a number count. Two or three is fine, Jesus said. So why not leave the counting to the P7 Arithmetic Class where it more properly belongs?

### **A prayer for today**

*The important count is whether I can count on God, and God can count on me.*