

**Readings: Isaiah 52:7-10, Ephesians 4:7-16,
John 10:1-16**

On Weds this week. I was walking along the busy Bromley High Street, on my way to get the train to have lunch with our ordinands when a stranger stopped me. Those who are being ordained priest will know this experience well, if we wear a clerical collar while we're out in the community we will often be stopped, a clerical collar is a fantastic tool for mission. I often end up in conversation with total strangers about their life stories, their health concerns, or those of a loved one,

I've had conversations with strangers about their deepest fears and greatest hopes, I've had conversations with people who are angry with God, those who have been hurt by the church and those who think what I believe is a load of rubbish. I'm stopped by people who are drunk or high, people affected by mental ill-health, or homelessness or for a whole host of reasons. On a sunny day if I'm wearing a short sleeved clerical top I'll often be stopped by people who didn't think vicars were allowed to have tattoos. Being stopped by strangers and hearing peoples stories and sharing my experiences of Jesus while wearing a clerical collar is one of my favourite parts of being the job.

Anyway, my encounter on Weds was different to any I've had before – I was stopped in the busy High Street by a tall, reasonably well-dressed man who seemed to be in his 20's, he didn't seem to be under the influence of any substances, he didn't present as unwell in any way, he wasn't visible upset or anxious. He asked in an Eastern European accent – are you a priest? I am, I replied ready to hear his life story as I knew I had plenty of time before my train. Anglican, he asked, yes, will you bless me he asks and closes his eyes, bows his head and puts his hands together in prayer. Now this is new to me, I'm very happy to pray with anyone who asks but usually that's come after at

least a few moments of conversation, so I know what they want prayer for. I asked his name, and he replied keeping his head bowed and eyes closed. I'll call him Yacob to protect his privacy in case anyone knows him. He clearly didn't want to have a conversation. At once my brain went into overdrive – what should I pray, what does he want – what does he need? I sensed he didn't want a long prayer and given his body language I surmised he needed something a bit more formal than my usual style of prayer. So I prayed something along the lines of Thank you loving God that you know exactly what Yacob needs and that you are able to meet all those needs,

I thank you Jesus for your love, I pray that you would watch over Yacob and bless him in the name of FSHS (arms) Amen. He opened his eyes, thanked me, he clearly didn't want to talk further but as he walked away he told me I'm not religious but my mother prays for me everyday.

That was probably one of my least eloquent and shortest prayers ever, there was no deep listening or opportunity for pastoral follow-up, but God was present, and I have to trust that God is at work in that man's life. So ordinands can I encourage you to wear your collar when you're out and about, to be ready to pray

for anyone who might stop you in the street, and to expect that God is at work in our world.

I was ordained priest on 3rd July 2010. I love being a priest, it is an amazing privilege to love and serve God's people, to point to Jesus, to play my part in sharing the love of God with the world. I pray that each person being ordained today has the same rich blessed experience of ministry that I have had.

I know that at times ministry can be challenging, having served as Deacons for a year I'm sure you know that too, but I hope it is also a deep joy.

God has called you to love his people, serve his church and share the message of hope with the world – this is a huge responsibility but an even greater privilege. It is often said that the work of a priest is to love your people and say your prayers. I think that's a pretty good summary of what we are called to do as ordained ministers.

There is there is so much wisdom tightly packed into our 3 Bible readings; There is much I could say but I want to briefly share three areas for priests, and in fact all of us, to focus on.

Firstly - an important reminder that the gospel of Jesus is good news.

In Isaiah we read 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news.' Each person here today is invited to be a messenger of Christ, proclaiming that faith in Jesus offers freedom, hope, liberation, love, peace, acceptance, salvation. This good news is for everyone. For those being ordained priest today can I remind you that as much as you will love and care for your congregations, they are not your only responsibility, it is so easy over the years to become too embedded in the church, there will always be more work to do, more admin, more listening, more time needed to prepare services and sermons –

I think Jesus understands this more than anyone, he talks about being the Good Shepherd who cares for his sheep, I know my own and my own know me - knowing our church communities and being known is essential, but Jesus goes on to say I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also. I'm confident you all understand this, but can I encourage you as the years go by, and as the demands of parish life build up, to hold onto your passion for mission, hold onto the deep truth that Jesus is good news for those outside the church as well as those inside, to never allow yourself to be too busy to respond to God at work in the world.

Secondly, those ordained priest are never called to be lone rangers or to assume that we must do everything. God has given different gifts to build up the body of Christ, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, the role of a priest is to equip **all** God's people for the work of ministry, spotting, nurturing and releasing each person to be all that God intends them to be. To curate a community of faith who will proclaim and embody the good news of Jesus, reaching out with love and hope to the world. There is a role and a calling for each person, everyone here has a vocation, not just those being ordained,

perhaps you are called to be a lay minister or a church warden, maybe you're called to live out your everyday faith in your workplace or school, maybe for some of you journeying as friends and supporters of someone being ordained today, your call might be to explore for yourself what faith in Jesus might mean for you. In God's kingdom there is room for everyone.

And for anyone who feels daunted, unworthy or unqualified we can take comfort from Jesus' reminder I AM the Good Shepherd –

I find that really helpful, people's destiny and well-being doesn't depend on my amazing pastoral or evangelistic skills, our task is simply to help people connect with Jesus, the good shepherd.

And last but not least to those who are being ordained today please remember that ministry is supposed to be a joy and not a burden, Jesus promises life in abundance; This does not mean that life and ministry will always be without challenge, but the abundant life Jesus offers is fulfilling, fruitful and rewarding. If you have days when ministry feels like a heavy burden then that's the time to pause and refresh,

reconnect to God through scripture or prayer or walking by the sea or eating good food or quality time with friends and family – whatever nurtures your soul and your well-being and helps you to stay rooted in Christ.

Today is an exciting day, James, Robert, Anna, Hannah, Jessica, Mark, Ray, Andrew and Roberta are about to be ordained as priests in God's church. Today marks the next step in a long journey of listening for and responding to the call of God. What a privilege it is to be here with you as you step into your future with God by your side.

May you always proclaim the good news of Jesus, may you continually equip others to build God's Kingdom, and most of all may you always know the extravagant, abundant love of God. Amen.