

Sat in the photocopying room at ten past eleven on Friday night while the copier churned out shiny Orders of Service I wondered why life was so busy, why I was here, what it was Hannah has signed up for- a lifetime of odd working hours and learning useful things that they never got round to covering at theological college, like how to even use a photocopier and what to do when a large chunk of stone falls off your church onto a public footpath out of office hours. So, what is it that Hannah has signed up for?

The Church explains what it wants its priests to do at their Ordination- *servants and shepherds among the people, messengers, watchmen, stewards, to grow into the likeness of God... With all God's people, they are to tell the story of God's love.* And so it goes on, a poetic and beautiful and aspirational litany which says everything but little you can put in your diary.

If you took a straw poll at Finchampstead shops about what a priest does you would, I suspect, get a range of opinions informed largely by the Vicar of Dibley and Rev and Emmerdale and at least one wag would say that they only work Sundays.

It would have been fascinating to get one of you to preach this morning on what it is to be priested to- hopefully you'd have used words like kindness, enabling, care, support, proclamation, presence. Being paid to pray and be still. To bless. To bury her own needs so that the community can share in bread and wine. To be called to encourage the pilgrim people of God on their journey and to invite others, all of us, to join the adventure.

What I would say, 12 years down the line from my own priesting, is that it is impossible to separate the priest from the person- God called you and the way you minister, the way you treat people, the things you choose to do and not do, what you worry and pray about, are all the out workings of who you are which is who God called- which is Paul's point in his 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter to the Corinthians when he talks about how God is a work in him, even, especially, in weakness.

I would say to Hannah- remember who you serve- both God and God's precious people, those who know his face and those who do not (especially, perhaps, those who do not). You don't really serve the Diocese, though they sort-of pay you. You don't primarily serve the people in the pews and seats

here. You don't serve the Church of England, glorious though she is. The Diocese allows you money to eat, the people here are your team, the Church of England is a key which will open many doors. You are sent to a parish not a Congregation. Never forget that it is God and the people Jesus loves enough to die for who you serve, which is to say everyone.

I would say to Hannah- priesthood is fun, life is fun, ministry is fun, leadership is fun. And if it ever stops being fun you need to find out why and fix it.

I would say to Hannah- people might need you but they don't own you. Protect yourself because, to be blunt, no one else will do it for you. I know a lot of clergy who are in danger of working themselves into an early grave- I don't know any who will die of boredom. Remember you are called to be and not to do. Remember you are called to be a person of prayer and stillness in a rushing world.

I would say to Hannah, quoting someone wiser than I- preside at the altar as if this were the first, the last, the only time. And I would say to her- not only this, but everything- take assemblies, do funeral visits, seize the passing conversation, wrestle with the Gospels as if this were the first, the last, the only time.

I would say to Hannah- being ordained is an immense privilege but being baptised is what truly counts, where it all began, the root and foundation of your whole being, where you learned to start living as a beloved child of God.

And I would say the same to you- it all starts with baptism. All of us are called to live lives of response to the outpouring of love on the cross and at our baptism. The priest has a specific role as equipper, enabler, encourager: but the whole point is that the priest has a call to do everything (visibly and publicly) which we are all called to do and become in baptism. Through the cross, we are loved by God into relationship and wholeness. In the font, we are set free of all that ensnares and entangles. And we are all, all of us, sent out, at baptism and every time we celebrate the Eucharist, to be light in a dark world, hope in a fragile world, love in a broken world because we know that we are loved and forgiven.

(Mark 6 reference) That call to be disciples, to heal and serve, to love and hold, to be a blessing and a light, is given us in baptism, not only, not chiefly, in ordination. It is all of our call and challenge. The priest has a specific role in

helping us to respond to God's charge, as watchman and shepherd, as celebrant and captain. But don't think for a moment that a Church's mission and ministry is somehow the job of the clergy. The mission of God, the requirement to share the Good News and to be Good News, the call to be and build God's kingdom, is given to the whole Church. Which is to say us. Which is to say you.

The clergy will try not to get in the way. They may even help, sometimes. But mission and service are the task and joy of the whole Church of God, working together with all of our different skills and talents and experience and insight, responding to God's call out of who we are- called, together, to tell the story of God's love in this building and beyond it, in the world as well. It is an immense responsibility and a great adventure. It is our responsibility. It is our adventure.

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