

We may serve God in holiness and truth

Two or three weeks ago I spoke of the way that the body of Christ meets people in so many different ways and in so many different places. From the way that each of us has the capacity to make Christ known in the relationships we have with others in our daily lives to the way that people are touched by the presence of God in holy places such as this building; people meet God in many different ways, and the body of Christ grows as we recognise the love of God wherever it may be.

Today (and in the coming week) our Collect prays that we might come together and serve God – it refers to each of us finding our vocation and fulfilling the ministry that we are given by God.

So often this sort of phrase, and these words – vocation and calling – are seen to refer to the calling that is recognised in people like me and Ian, or Sylvia and Paul, who are called to a formal and public ministry on behalf of the church: as ordained ministers, or as Lay Readers.

But the ministry of the Church is so much wider than that – to only see the Church's ministry as the ministry that is undertaken by a few of its members is to lose all that I spoke of when I said that the body of Christ is present wherever any of us happens to be – and that we bind it together by the relationships we share with each other, and with those in our wider lives. So it is that priests and deacons, and other recognised ministers, represent the ministry of the whole Church.

Over these past few days there have been ordinations across the Church as, Diocese by Diocese, the calling of people to a particular role – as priest or deacon – has been recognised by the prayer of the people and the laying on of hands by Bishops. In those services the ministry of the Church will have been described:

- it involves the Church praying for those it serves, and worshipping God in every place
- it involves encouraging people to grow closer to God
- it means reaching out beyond the boundaries of the congregation to those who find Christ in different ways, and in different places
- it means serving those in need in the wider community so that God's love for all is made visible
- and it means encouraging each other to serve God wherever we may find ourselves.

Of course, the fact that I walk around the town and am visible as a priest, means that I have a particular ministry of my own, but I hope that you can also see that each of us has our own part to play in the ministry that Christ calls the whole Church to undertake:

- we can each pray for those who we know to be in need, and we can each worship God – both when we gather together as we do now and in the glory of God’s creation beyond these four walls
- we can each grow closer to God as we recognise his love in those we meet, and seek to love each other as God loves us
- we can reach out to those who are not part of this particular congregation – perhaps as we meet people visiting this place, as we meet people at work, as we meet people in club or pub, and home or out & about
- we can all serve those we meet who are in need, and make God’s love for all visible – whether it is in practical care for others and the smallest ‘good deed’, or in supporting causes (such as the Community Larder) that do help those in particular need
- and above all we can each encourage one another by recognising that each of us already does God’s work and giving thanks for all that we do in his name (whether we know it or not!)

So, whilst a couple of weeks ago I spoke of the way that the Church is where the love of Christ is known – wherever, whenever and however that may be. Today, I hope that we can give thanks for the ministry of the whole Church in holding that loose and widely spread collection of individual people together in the relationships we have with each other, and our common relationship with God. At the heart of this calling to be ministers of God’s love in Christ is our own call to live lives that are grounded in Jesus’ commandment to know God ourselves in worship and to make God’s love known to those we meet – ‘to worship the Lord our God with all we have and to love our neighbour’.

So now, as we gather here – each of us called by God – let us pray for the ministry of the whole Church – of each of us – as we pray that we might serve God in holiness and truth, that we might be a faithful people to the glory of his name. Amen.