

Ephesians week 3

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Yesterday, for the first time in 3 years, Christ Church Cathedral in Oxford was full. Not once, but three times in a day. The Bishop of Oxford was presiding at all three services as he ordained new Deacons into the Church of God. Amongst them, of course, was our beloved Catherine. She was so radiant, as Bishop Olivia commented in her sermon about all the candidates. Radiant because of what has done, is doing, and will do in Catherine's life. Not because of any self-importance, although Catherine did find herself at the very centre of attention yesterday. But radiant because God has been, and is at work in Catherine's life.

As a church we are engaging at the moment with St Paul's letter to the new church in Ephesus, in what is now south-west Turkey. Paul new this place and had been amongst the emerging church there. He wrote to them, as from in prison, and encouraged the new church to understand what God is doing in their lives, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Two weeks ago we thought how St Paul helped the new church understand that they are part of something bigger than themselves – and ekklesia, or Church, a community of communities tasked with building the Kingdom of God. Last week we thought together how St Paul, in Chapter of his letter, teaches the church that their salvation comes not from how good they are, or how hard they work, or how much faith they have, but from the free offer of God's love to us. We are saved by God's grace, and can claim this benefit because of our baptism.

So we come to Chapter 3 of his letter to the Ephesians, which acts as the end of the first part of this letter. Paul reminds the church of the great riches God has given us – his forgives, his healing, his compassion, his love. And he teaches the church that this offer is available to all – no one is beyond Christ's saving reach; no one is beyond his mercy.

I wonder whether we have ever thought about the Christian faith as riches from God? I wonder whether our faith touches the depths of our heart, and whether we allow it to nourish us as God intends it to? Paul is trying to teach the Church that – in the face of the challenges of life (whatever generation we find ourselves in) - that God wants us to be able to stand firm in his love. "I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge". In other words, know how much God loves you and what this can mean for your life. Since our baptism, how much have we pondered how much God loves us. Every day, or less frequently? In the ordination service yesterday, the Bishop asked the candidates to make a series of declarations. He introduced his questions in these words, which form the basis for what we understand a Deacon to be: "Deacons are called to work with the bishop and the priests with whom they serve as heralds of Christ's kingdom. They are to proclaim the gospel in word and deed, as agents of God's purposes of love". It strikes me, that through Deacons we can understand what St Paul is trying to teach the Church in this letter. Catherine is called into a ministry, alongside priests in this parish, and our Bishop who oversees us, to proclaim and work for the building of God's Kingdom. That is, the rule of God in his creation. To do this, Catherine is commissioned to a ministry of proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That doesn't mean going everywhere and reading the bible to people (although that may be worth giving a try!). But it is a ministry of telling your story Catherine, announcing how God has been and is at work in your life, and inviting others to reflect on the call of God in their lives. It is a ministry of service to others (the Bishop went on in this introduction to the ministry of Deacons reminding us that Deacons are to search out the poor and weak, the sick and the lonely – making the love of God visible).

Catherine – yesterday was a great day. But today the ministry begins. Try not to see ministry as a series of chores or tasks your training incumbent sets you. But as the great riches of knowing you are loved by God more than you can imagine, and called by God to this ministry of service. And we too, as those who know you and love you, will then be reminded by you that God calls us too. That those riches, St Paul talks about, are ours too. On this St Peter's Day, we recognise that we don't celebrate St Peter, or this church building. But we are in fact celebrating all that

God is doing is and through us. As we gently and slowly adapt to seeing you in a new role and calling (please be as patient with us as we will try to be with you!), please encourage us to consider not your ministry, but the call of God in our lives. Most of all, thank you for responding to the call of God over you, and for the encouragement you have given us already. In St Paul's words: "I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith, as you are being rooted and ground in love". Do please pray the same for each one of us in these years of ministry ahead.