

Archbishop Geoff Smith's sermon on commissioning the Rev'd Sally Sandford-Morgan in Lockleys

Ps 89.19-38

Genesis 25.5-11, 19-34

Luke 5.1-11

There are some surprising things to be found in the Bible readings for tonight.

In the first reading there is a turnabout of events. The story is about 2 brothers-Esau and Jacob. Esau was the older so he should have had the rights and responsibilities of the first born. However there was a switch and Jacob who was younger ended up be treated as the firstborn. That was a surprise.

In the psalm tonight there is reference to King David. He also was a bit of a surprise. He was a younger son in his family, and no one would have picked him to be the anointed king of Gods people.

And then in the reading from Luke's gospel is the account of Jesus calling Simon and James and John to follow him. That was also perhaps unexpected. The rabbi calling three fishermen to be his disciples. Uneducated, unsophisticated fishermen from a bit of a back water.

Now, we are here tonight commissioning Sally as the priest in charge of Lockleys parish. I don't want you to think that I am suggesting given the readings that Sally's appointment is a surprise, or that it is unexpected, or that Sally is uneducated or unsophisticated. I am not suggesting that at all.

But sometimes we can do that to ourselves. Have you heard of imposters syndrome? Imposters syndrome is when you think you are not good enough to do what you have been asked to do. You think you haven't got enough talent. You haven't got enough experience. You haven't got enough skills. And you feel like anyday everyone is going to realise the truth that there has been a terrible mistake and you can't do the role at all.

People who suffer from imposter syndrome usually can do the job and have all the gifts and talents required, but they don't have the confidence they need and so they doubt themselves.

Imposters syndrome can undermine a persons confidence and their performance and it can affect anyone in pretty much any role.

We are here tonight focussing on Sally commissioning but tonight's service includes these words: "All members of the church are called by Christ to share in its ministry. As members of the body of Christ we each have distinctive gifts to offer".

So everyone who is here tonight who is a member of the church are called by Christ to share in the ministry of the church which is the mission of God. All of us. And we all have distinctive gifts to share.

But it's very easy for us to doubt that we have gifts to share and it's very easy to doubt that God has called us. Even if we don't say it out loud we can think-I can't do that. I haven't got the gifts or talents or education or experience to do that.

And yet if God has called us God will give us what we need to carry out that call. That's the way it is.

We are called by Christ to share in the ministry of the church. The ministry of the church is to continue the ministry of Jesus. To act as an extension of Jesus ministry. What was Jesus' ministry? To announce that the kingdom of God, sometimes known as the reign of God, was near. That that situation where the world is put to rights is coming near in Jesus. And Jesus did things to show what that meant. He reconnected people with God. He reconnected people with their community. He fed the poor. He offered forgiveness and love and grace. He healed those who were sick, and pushed evil back.

He did that because when the kingdom of God comes in all its fulness there will be a situation of wholeness and healing for the whole creation. Jesus was pointing to that time through his words and actions and we the church are called to continue that ministry as we pray your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

That's what we are supposed to be doing for the community here at Lockleys. That's what Christ has called us to do.

There is no doubt that individuals can suffer from imposters syndrome, but I think that parish communities can suffer from it too. That leads to a lack of confidence. An uncertainty of purpose and focus. A fear to step out in faith and have a go.

I think it's safe to say that Peter and James and John didn't have much idea of what to do when they were called by Jesus. Jesus used that fun word play when he told them they would be catching people and not fish any more, but I think it's safe to say they had no idea. But Jesus had called them to go with him. So they went. They made mistakes along the way, but they ended up living out their calling wonderfully well.

They knew that they were called. They knew what their calling was to do. They knew that Jesus was still with them in the form of the Holy Spirit. Still guiding them. Still teaching them. Still making his presence known.

Tonight we are commissioning Sally to lead this parish with the lay leaders of the parish, in the ministry to which Christ calls this parish. Make no mistake Christ has called this parish community to share in his ministry. The ministry of the kingdom of God.

As the hymn says: We do have a gospel to proclaim. The gospel is that the kingdom of God is coming and in the life death and resurrection of Jesus it has come very near. This is very good news for the whole creation.

And we are called by Christ to keep making that future known to a community that really needs hope. It's not that the lucky ones are going to get whooshed off somewhere far far away to heaven, but that God will bring a new creation to the earth. Heaven and earth will be joined. That's very hopeful news and people need to hear it.

We are called to do what Jesus did and make that future real now as much as we can.

What might it mean to bring heaven to earth? That's what we are called to bring in our community. A situation where God's love is known and experienced. Where people have hope and connection and purpose and peace. Right here at Lockleys.

You might be thinking that's a utopian dream. And it would be if it were not for Jesus who showed this future is not a utopian dream but a present reality, breaking in. And it's breaking in wherever Christians heed that call to serve the ministry of Christ and do so in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Dr Google says that you can't cure imposters syndrome but you can respond to it. And two of the ways to deal with imposters syndrome is positive self-talk and have a go.

Those can apply to the church too. It's good that we remind ourselves and each other that we are the body of Christ. We do it every time we share the eucharist but I am sure it just rolls over our head. But if you think about that's an extraordinary thing to say. We are the body of Christ. We are his hands and feet and mouth and arms and legs. He does his ministry through us.

To help register this in our heads I sometimes introduce the peace differently that the words in the book which are just a suggestion anyway. I sometimes ask; who are we? And the answer is- we are the body of Christ. And then I say And? And the response is: his spirit is with us.

And that's the truth. Who are we? We are the body of Christ. And? His spirit is with us.

Tonight is Sally's commissioning but it's a chance for us all to recommit ourselves. Sally cannot do this ministry by herself and should not. If she did, she would be stealing ministry from you. This is for the whole parish.

I know it can be surprising to think that we are called to share in Christ's ministry. It's a bit unexpected that the living God, the creator of heaven and earth would call people like David, Peter, James and John, Sally Sandford Morgan, Geoff Smith and all of us to serve him. That's a surprise. But he did and he does.

Lets remember that. Depend on the Holy Spirit and despite our hesitations and fears, give it a go. Its Christ's ministry and we might be very surprised at what he does through us if we give him a go.

Who are we? We are the body of Christ. And what else? His spirit is with us. Amen.