

## Sermon for Paula Porter Leggett Induction – Sept 5, 2018

### Ephesians 4:1, 7-11

I wonder sometimes what the apostle Paul went through as he travelled from one church to another, seeing possibilities and potentials of each community. And seeking ways in which to tell the Good news story of God's love to a hungry and needy people. More than anything though, I think that Paul had an enthusiasm and vigour that compelled the people wherever he went to consider what God was doing amongst them.

That's what we're doing tonight – we are claiming the positive energy that a new beginning of ministry offers. We are cashing in on the hope that lies ahead of us and we are offering our prayers for this new ministry team that is made up of your Vicar, Paula, and you who are the people of St Albans in Richmond.

I began by thinking about the apostle Paul – so please allow me to continue in his words. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians writes, *“I therefore, ... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called...”*

Now there's a comforting note – let us never forget that it is God who calls to us – and our response must be a life worthy of that amazing love. God chose us not only before we did anything to deserve or even desire it, but before the creation of the world.

The life which we are to live in response is “worthy” not because it can ever deserve such overflowing grace, but because such grace both calls for and calls forth a life that is in line with God's intent for all creation.

To be in-line with God's desire for us is what we strive to accomplish in our lives. It's what I used to say as a young and naïve priest – “I don't care about being successful but I want to be faithful.”

These days of ministry are about faithfulness to the opportunities of service and growth within this Christian community. As Anglicans we have a voice that sings out of a balanced life of prayer, service, caring and learning. We live into this balance by the things that are “one” – and we echo Paul once again: one body of the church, called and sanctified by one Spirit; one hope which flows from God's calling; one Lord Jesus whom we all confess and into whom we are growing up; one faith and one baptism which bind us to him and to each other.

There remains a catch though - “bearing with one another” will be necessary because God has not only given the church its fundamental unity, but has also given the church a rich diversity of members. Each is a recipient of God's grace as the Spirit calls, equips, and gives people to the church.

The goal behind such giving is not uniformity, but a unity that reflects and serves God's reconciliation of the whole creation in Christ. If we aren't encountering and learning to love people who differ from us within the church, then something is wrong; this is not the healthy community that God desires.

Now these are the gifts Christ gives to the church: "the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ".

Christ gave five very specific gifts to the Church with a very specific assignment. Our responsibility in leadership is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. These verses make clear that the priest – or pastor's, responsibility is to equip God's people to do Christ's work and build up the Church. It describes a beautiful partnership between the priest and the members.

Equipping people for ministry, therefore, is the process of people to function in ministry as they are called and gifted by God. You, the community of St Albans have many gifts, amongst them a passion of caring and serving those who live on the margins of life, who are needing compassion and help, not pity or scorn. And Paula now joins you to help nurture your faith and teach the Good News that keeps you focused on God's will. Remember, be faithful and you will be doing the will of God.

But most distinctively, is the passage from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. The apostle Paul writes, *"For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake."*

I believe that God has called Paula to this parish in order that the good work started here by past priests and lay-people, will be nurtured and God's people who find themselves in this place will be cared for and challenged to grow in their faith.

Do you remember the words of the well-known hymn, "Tell out my soul"? One verse says, *"Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!  
Powers and dominions lay their glory by. Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight, the hungry fed, the humble lifted high"*.

I think that there are tender hearts, and stubborn wills in this and every other place wherever God's people gather! But that doesn't matter because God has called you to build God's kingdom together, not just as the parish of St Albans in Richmond but with all of the other Parishes in the Diocese and with the prayerful and loving service of our Archbishop Melissa.

Let me leave you with these words of Paul as he writes, *"... it is with God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart"*.

So, take God's heart - for our journey is blessed and strengthened by God's spirit. Together, let us remember whom it is we serve – and let us work tirelessly to walk humbly following in the footsteps of the one who loves us most, Jesus Christ our Lord.

*The Venerable Elizabeth Northcott*



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