

LLM Licensing Service

18 September 2021

Readings:

Isaiah 43: 18-21

Matthew 9:35-end

Let us pray...

Lord, may your living word speak into our hearts and minds in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

You ain't seen nothing yet!

So says the prophet Isaiah. Or words to that effect.

There's a real sense that something new is about to happen.

Isaiah is in a place of anticipation, expectation, belief that God is about to do a new thing.

Anticipation can be a wonderful thing, can't it?

There has been a real sense of anticipation about this service today hasn't there?

How wonderful that we are celebrating the licensing of Jan-Rebecca, Steven, Paul, Mark, Barbara, and Matthew, admitting Natalie and welcoming Alan to the Diocese. Not only here in this magnificent cathedral but also beaming out through the airwaves to those joining in via live streaming, so more people can be connected.

Emerging from a pandemic which is still raging in the world... this mixed ecology... hybrid church, call it what you will is a positive way forward but it's a new challenge for us, as we reach out in a new way where all can be made welcome.

But the people in the Isaiah reading don't appear to have a sense of anticipation.

Right now, they are a disappointed people. They're stuck. Nothing exciting is happening. They are filled to overflowing with misery and disappointment. So, who are these people?

Well, they are God's people in exile, back in the sixth century, feeling abandoned in the wilderness of tyranny and persecution. Captured and incarcerated as aliens under Babylonian rule. Cut off from support from Jerusalem, where they believe God is residing in the Temple – ignoring their plight.

Enter the prophet Isaiah, the voice that cries, "You ain't seen nothing yet!"

God's messenger and God's encourager.

Bringer of comfort and hope.

Isaiah has seen the end to their captivity. Hooray!

But, says Isaiah, God is asking you not to dwell on anything from the past.

This is not our focus right now, declares Isaiah.

God is saying forget all that.

For God is about to do a new thing. Can't you see it?

A new thing in a dramatic way; bigger than anything that's gone before.

Isaiah has already been reassuring the people of God's love for them – that they are called by name; that they are cherished. Chosen.

Trust me, God is saying, in this divine oracle spoken through the prophet.

Trust God, Creator God, who will bring living waters in the desert wilderness; life to those who drink it.

Be encouraged says Isaiah.

How can we be encouraging in our communities? It might have felt as though we have been in a wilderness struggling against the odds.

Yet there has been a real sense of people seeking to connect with their spirituality during this time of pandemic. Asking big questions, seeking something new, exploring faith in a new way. Covid, devastating and destructive, has also been a catalyst, creating new opportunities to make known God's love in our communities.

As we emerge into a new light – one that beams with hope – how can we begin to build on what we are witnessing around us? How can we use our buildings in creative and welcoming ways...or do things differently? It's been amazing to see church flourishing in the open air, too, with wild and outdoor churches putting down experimental and tentative roots. New ways to make connections in the community.

Ah yes, I can hear you say? That's all very well but there's only one of me... we've only a small team... we're already stretched to the limit.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few..." [Matthew 9:37]

Many are still shielding; and just when we have something planned someone in the team has to go into isolation. But it's not a hopeless case. We don't need to feel harassed and helpless, like the people Jesus' heart goes out to in our reading.

Jesus invites us to ask for God's help because we can't do it on our own, in our own strength.

We're all in this together, with God. All part of this huge and diverse Diocese, serving God in our various roles. With bishops, clergy, archdeacons and laity. Whatever shape that may be, working together. We need each other.

And what about those who encouraged us in our ministry? Family, friends, church communities who noticed our gifts and supported our response.

Maybe you are here today because you are one of the great supporters.

And we thank you.

But what about you? What might you feel called to do?

As LLMs **we** are uniquely placed in our roles, often referred to as bridges between church and community, to make connections... to be encouragers just like Isaiah... just like Jesus.

But have you noticed that if you ask someone what an LLM is... there are often two responses... either 'I don't know'... or 'yes, you're a preacher'.

But we have been re-defined in a new way... as Teachers of the faith (so yes, preaching is a big part of this)... as 'Enablers of Mission and Leaders in Church and Society'. But how are people going to know this if we don't tell them?

It's up to us to celebrate our ministry... to be advocates; to be outward and forward looking.

How about continuing to pray, to look around and think... how can we resource mission in our communities? How can we encourage others in their gifting and in their calling? There are so many different opportunities and ministries for people to explore. Let's encourage those conversations.

Don't know about you but it's been a really steep learning curve getting to grips with all the technology. One solution has been to look for the techies in the community. Maybe it's someone who's never set foot in the church building but whose gifting and passion for filming, editing and uploading fulfils a calling in them.

It's such a privilege for us all to be encouragers. And within this, to create a culture of celebration, recognising all people's gifts and giftedness and giving thanks to God.

Sustained by God's spiritual living waters, we can make a difference. What new thing can we do? Who are the new people we can be alongside, nurture and encourage?

God is encouraging us to do a new thing where, refreshed by God's everlasting Spirit, all are invited to participate.

God provides a way, through our openness to new possibilities and our willingness to take a step forward into the new.

Jan-Rebecca, Steven, Paul, Mark, Barbara and Matthew are doing just that. They have been in training for three years now and are about to step into their ministry as newly licensed LLMs. It's fantastic that our training is alongside ordinands these days, sowing the seeds of collaborative practice. So important as we work together for God's kingdom.

I wonder what God has in store?

Jesus brings, through his ministry and mission, in the words of scholar Walter Brueggemann, a radical newness to the world. This implies being daring, being bold. Trusting God in the journey.

Are we willing to be co-creators with God, bringing about, through God's Spirit the new things that God wants to do **in** us and **through** us today? And in doing so, may we find, to paraphrase a great prophet...

We ain't seen nothing yet!

Claire Horton
Licensed Lay Minister
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