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Dear Reader,

*“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever.
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so...(Psalm 107)*

Yesterday, flicking the duster around the window ledges and photos in our lounge, I gazed for a moment at a picture of myself and Billy standing outside Guildford Cathedral on the day of my priesting. I am clutching a bible and smiling tentatively with my white stole draped, for the first time, like a yoke around my neck. Only a year before, the photos told another story when a tear stained deacon emerged from the narthex sobbing that she had never wanted to be a dog collar wearing public person. I had been so happy nurturing a Sunday Club of nearly 60 youngsters and felt ill equipped for the task ahead. Now, I was just about smiling for through my deacon's year I had learned a little of what it means to be the servant of the servants, to tend the sick, to sit with the dying, to bind up the broken hearted and to proclaim the gospel in both word and deed. The shock was now not as great a year on because I had found fulfilment in the giving and receiving of ministry, yet the sense of inadequacy remained for I, the sinful one, would be called upon from that day onwards to preside at God's Holy Mysteries in the Church of God. The task seemed enormous ...and yet, as the years have passed, I have come to realise that everything that went before was in some small way a preparation for the task. The skills learned at elocution lessons as a small child, the give and take of being part of a family, the highs and lows of simply being human, of falling off or being thrown from your horse and getting on again, the tools learned as a Company Director and, of course, hosting and sharing a meal with our large family and their friends. Nothing it seems is lost or wasted in God's economy. Belinda will learn this afresh very soon – when she offers God's absolution for the first time she will recall the undeserved forgiveness she has received from others and know she is neither more important nor perfect than you but simply part of God's story with a particular role to play. She will be in our prayers this week as she retreats from the busy world for a few days and then steps out in faith at her ordination next Saturday.



The opening words of psalm 107, “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever” are perhaps words used long ago by the priestly caste when the people would bring their gifts to the altar. The words, “O give thanks” bid sinful Israel to articulate a deep gratitude for God's patience, creative power and generosity in their lives. And the words that follow provide some explanation, “let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south”.

The psalmist and God's people are to understand exodus in its broadest sense, not just as an escape from slavery to freedom in a promised land, but as deliverance from suffering in all its awfulness. The east was and is the place from where the sun rises; its scorching heat gives no respite. I have felt faint in the sun and heat of the day both in Jerusalem and Galilee but also in my work and personal life. The west in contrast is not just the place of the setting sun but it symbolises the darkness and the dangers that lurk in all our lives. We let ourselves and others down over and over again. For the children of Israel the north was the place from which most military dangers and cruel losses came. Whilst the “south” in many bibles is quite probably the translator trying to provide us the symmetry of a compass but the original text uses the word “yam” and means sea rather than “yamin” that means north. The psalmist tells the story of chaos and suffering that shapes both our lives and tomorrow's gospel. He speaks of some “going down to the sea in ships and doing business on the mighty waters” losing courage as the waves engulf them. Israel was not

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a sea faring nation but it certainly knew, as I have known, the unexpected storms of life and also the storms that rocked their small and fragile boats and seem to come from nowhere on the Lake of Galilee.

And yet, says the psalmist, when the people “*cried to the Lord in their trouble*” he, “*brought them out from their distress and made the storm be still*”. Our gospel writers craft stories of Jesus in a boat based on this psalm of praise for God’s enduring and steadfast love. They believe as their forebears did that God alone walks through the waters and has the power to bring order out of creation’s chaos, so the priest summons them to “*give thanks to the Lord, for he is good*”.



The 'Ancient Galilee Boat' housed in the Yigal Allon Museum in Kibbutz Ginosar

I have pondered these words during the week as I have gone about “*doing business on the mighty waters*” of The Garth Ministry Area. Sometimes it feels like I am attempting to navigate my little boat through chaos for the waves seem to mount and subside with threatening and unpredictable regularity. Like the sailors whose “*courage melted away in their calamity ...reeled and staggered like drunkards, and were at their wit’s end*” I have sometimes wondered which way to steer following the departure of priests from Pentyrch and Tongwynlais for I, alone, am left your Ministry Area leader and the only fulltime priest in our area! You may even wonder at times such as this, what does your Vicar do?!

Last Monday I spent several hours with the head of St Fagans Primary school, who is facing significant safety and safeguarding challenges caused by a huge building project. The job will take months and problems cannot be fixed when the children are on site. I spent time that afternoon with the Mother’s Union, planning a funeral and, later that evening, rehearsing with Lucy and Brett whose marriage takes place in St Mary’s today. I was up very late that night trying to piece together the rota to ensure we have enough clergy and retired priests able to conduct the 12 or 13 services that take place across our area for the next couple of months. I went to bed feeling overwhelmed ...but several hours spent on Tuesday with one of our retired Archbishops helped “*the storm be still*” and enabled me to let the Church Wardens of the vacant parishes know who will conduct their services. Midweek services in Radyr and Danescourt, being called to preach on the dangers of “religiosity”, reminded me once again of the dangers of the job! Conducting a painfully sad funeral in Pentyrch of a young and gifted nurse whose teenage son and mother were understandably grief stricken put my role in perspective. This may not have been the “job” I dreamed of but even in the midst of human suffering we were able, as the psalmist puts it, to “*extol him in the congregation of the people*”. Sian had sung in the choir for years. She had lived for, served and saved others but she could not in the end save herself from her own demons. Yet even when the family’s courage “*melted away in their calamity*” they thanked God for the ways in which she had been a blessing to her family and those she cared for. Her’s was God’s story and I felt humbled to be part of it. On Thursday evening I chaired the Ethos, Well-being and Safeguarding Committee of St Fagans Primary School - our role is to maintain the Christian ethos and value of the school and to protect the well-being of both learners and staff. What a privilege. On Friday I spent time with two priests who are struggling - one with unwelcome changes in her Deanery in England and another who has been bullied and subsequently ostracised by colleagues in this

Diocese. There is a case to answer and my heart bleeds for him. The role of a priest is not simply to be loved or even liked but sometimes it is also to be crucified. We know that story very well.

Yet, as I look back over this past week, the chaos and the storms - there are things I am so thankful for and I share some with you because I hope they will help you know the ways in which our ministry area is taking shape and how the gifts found in particular parishes are nurturing the needs of other parishes. As the Ministry Area is formed, individuals are being called out for particular roles to be exercised across the parishes. I have been so encouraged to watch this week as Ceri, the retired head of St Teilo's school who lives and worships in St Mary's and has accepted the role as Ministry Area Safeguarding lead, is working with the wardens and safeguarding advisers of all the parishes to ensure all who work with children and vulnerable adults are properly trained and checked and to see that all who serve on our current Parochial Councils have engaged with the training available to them through St Padarn's. I have similarly been thrilled to watch the support Ian, a Church Warden, ex Ofsted inspector and member of Taff's Well congregation, is giving as a new governor to the head of St Fagans in arranging to audit her Safeguarding processes. I have been delighted to see new forms of evening worship emerging here, perhaps we can share them more widely just as Sunday Club on Zoom and the Confirmation Group have been shared across the whole Ministry Area.

In the midst of our storms we still have so much to be thankful for so let's with the psalmist say,
"Thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works..let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders"

Yours in Christ,

Vicki
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