

Saturday 16th July 2016 St Saviour's, East London 10 a.m.		Season of Pentecost Decade of Mission & Evangelism Intentional Discipleship
Isaiah 61:1-3a	Psalm 145:1-7	2 Cor 5:14-19
		John 20:19-23
The call, grace and power of God		

“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit...’” (John 20:21-22)

Greetings

Greetings to Bishop Ebenezer, your dear wife mama Noncedo; the Archdeacon to the Ordinary, the Venerable BTM Mfenyana, and Ayanda; the Bishop's Executive Officer, Canon Lawrence Nzwana, and Nosipho; our sub-dean, the Revd Mzinzisi Dyantyi and your dear wife Lilitha; members of Cathedral Chapter, Archdeacons, Canons and your spouses; honorary Canons; clergy colleagues and your spouses; religious orders present amongst us: the Community of the Resurrection of our Lord, and the Order of the Holy Cross; guild presidents and executives of the MU, BMG, AWF, Youth, Mary Magdalene, St Agnes, Altar Servers, together with all your members; the faithful people of the diocese of Grahamstown gathered here this morning; and especially to those who are to be ordained today; your families, and the parishes where you are serving: I greet you all in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Alice, Mxoli, Gwen, Etienne – what a privilege it has been to spend these past few days with you, through your ordination retreat.

Thank you, Bishop Ebenezer, for allowing me this very special time, this great gift. We have been walking on holy ground.

“It takes a village to raise a child.” It takes a faithful family, and a community of faith, to raise up a priest and pastor. To the families and parish communities of those who are being ordained; and to the entire

diocese: thank you for your prayers for these four wonderful people; and for us all over this past week of retreat. We have been carried by your prayers.

Our context as a diocese

This is the first diocesan event since our Synod. Let's remind ourselves of the launch by the Bishop at Synod of the decade of Mission and Evangelism; and the words of blessing and hope shared with us. For me, Synod was a holy time when we were brought together in one place as the family of God; it was a time to be reminded who we are called to be as God's people, as the church; it was a time to be strengthened and sent out to do the work of God.

And that is why we are gathered here this morning.

We are here as the family of God to set apart, with the laying on of hands and prayers, four of our number for the sacred ministry as priests, pastors and teachers, to serve the people of God. People – these four, and us all – responding to the call of God.

As we do so, we are reminded of who we are called to be as God's people, as the church. We do this by the grace of God.

And we are all strengthened and sent out in the power of the Spirit to do the work of God. The power of God.

The call of God; the grace of God; the power of God.

The call, power and grace of God

1. The call of God

The very first question to those to be ordained: “Do you believe that you are truly called by God and his Church to the life and work of a priest?”

This is what we all return to, day by day, and what we are here to witness in this ordination. We are here to affirm their response to God's call, and ours – the call heard by Isaiah in our first reading: to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free – salvation in all its fullness - that powerful, life-changing commissioning that Jesus reads and acknowledges in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:18-21) – words that we hear and reflect on, following on from the baptism of Jesus – and these become our commissioning, our calling, our word from God – *this is what you and I are called to do*. To set people free from all that destroys life, all that oppresses and binds them. That is the call of God to these four, and that is the call of God to us all as the church.

God's call to these four: through visions and dreams; through scripture (Isaiah 6 – who shall I send? Here am I, Lord, send me); like Moses, who heard his call in a foreign land; through deep inner stirring and conviction.

Jesus read those verses, rolled up the scroll, sat down – and then said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” And we say with Jesus, with the four who are being ordained, we say as the people of God: Today this scripture is being fulfilled. The Spirit of the Lord is upon them, upon us: to bring good news to the poor, and to set the prisoners free. To bring salvation. We hear and we respond once again to the call of God.

2. The grace of God

We are here as the body of Christ, seeking to be obedient to the prompting of the Holy Spirit wherever the Lord has placed us – whether in Southernwood, or Mdantsane, or Greenfields, or Nahoon, or Joza, or the Cathedral – to share in the ministry of reconciliation that we heard about in our 2nd reading: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, but entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ...” (2 Cor 5:19-20)

It is by God's grace that we do this. As the people of God, we inhabit that in-between space: we are the bridge between God and the world: our eyes and our hearts are constantly on the things of God, open to His Spirit; yet we are also very much in the world, the world of our families, our friends, our community, fully part of the struggles and joys and sorrows: the hard reality of suffering and pain and broken lives. It is to this broken world, struggling, at war with itself – the world of our elections on 3rd August; our country with its vast inequalities; the agony and pain of the terror attack two days ago in Nice, France - that God sent his Son to reconcile us all to God; and it is to this broken world that we have been given the message of reconciliation: that God reaches out through his Son Jesus, and through the body of Christ, the church, to bring the world back to himself. It is by God's grace that we do this.

3. The power of God

The Charge to the Priests in the ordination service ends with these words:

“This ministry will be your great joy and privilege.

“It is also a weighty responsibility which none would dare to undertake except for the call from God. To you whom he calls, he will always give his strength.” (AAPB pg 588)

We as the people of God, the church, and especially those who are being ordained this morning, are strengthened and sent out in the power of the Spirit to do the work of God.

On that first Easter Day, Jesus came and stood among his disciples and said, “Peace be with you.... As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit...’” (John 20:19, 21-22) He gave them power from on high.

Today Jesus breathes on you four with a particular ministry in the life of the church. He gives you power to set people free; he gives you the gift of God's peace to share with others. It is a ministry that you are to treasure with all your heart. Because as much as the whole people of God is given the Holy Spirit, we ordain people to help the body of Christ remain faithful: to be living witnesses to the power of the Spirit in us; and to constantly remind the church that this is how we are called to live. Full of the power of the Holy Spirit. Given to set people free. Sharing God's peace.

And we need you to be faithful to your calling. That is why we ask you questions, and we ask you to promise, to give us your word, that you will do this ministry, and that you will do it with all your heart. Please keep the promises you make this day; return to them frequently; meditate on them; pray over them; may these promises and this ministry become as natural to you as breathing: part of your life.

This is not just a job that you go to and leave behind when you clock off at 5 p.m. – which is why the relationship between priest and the church is a spiritual relationship; it is not an employment contract; we are not employees; labour law does not apply to those who are ordained. Labour law puts limits on a person's work; the work and life and ministry of a priest, a deacon, a bishop, has no limits. We are not using employment language here. This is not the realm of the CCMA. If anything, the life, work and ministry of a priest or deacon calls for a much higher standard of work, a much greater level of commitment, a much deeper level of personal integrity, than any labour contract could ask.

The call of God; the grace of God; the power of God.

CONCLUSION

May the Lord, who has called you, continue to equip you, continue to strengthen you, and continue to fill you with His Spirit.

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