

Psalm 27; Matthew 21: 23 - 32

So!

Good morning!

Here I am, ordained – finally I get to wear this collar!

Now, I'm not sure if you are all aware of my journey into ordination, and so this morning I thought I would outline it briefly for you.

So I was originally going to be a primary school teacher – well, when I say originally that was my plan after A-levels.

Then Leah mentioned the idea of church children's work and I had this sense that actually that would be something I'd really enjoy, so instead of going to university to do primary teaching I went to do youth and childrens' ministry at the Elim Pentecostal Church's Bible College, it used to be up the road here in Nantwich but moved to Malvern.

After completing that degree I got a job working for a church in Bath, as a children and families worker, and one day, as I was sitting in the church office the Vicar popped his head in: "I've just been praying for you" he said "and had this real sense that you'd be doing this for a while, and then heading off to be a Vicar" ...

Now, this was not the first time someone had said to me "are you going to be a Vicar" I'd had it the entire time I'd been at Bible College. And so, as usual I said "no"!

"Ah, but why are you saying no?" the vicar asked, and well, I couldn't give a clear answer. He suggested I went away and prayed about it, thought about it and that he could help if I wanted to try testing this calling.

After much thought and deliberation I did, I went to meet what was known in the Bath and Wells diocese as a Vocations Adviser, and he said to me: "Look – I think there might be something in this, but you need to step up, and step into this call if you think it's right – you need to accept it as your call."

Well, I thought that was what I did, and so entered what is known as the 'discernment process'

Two years later, after meeting with a whole load of different people who all prayed and discerned with me that this was the way forward, I went to what's known as Advisory a Bishops Panel or a BAP. This is the place where you are interviewed by three different people, you do a sort of mini exam and you write a pastoral essay. You also present on a topic to your fellow interviewees' and you join in group discussions with the others.

It's an intense weekend! Then you go home, and you wait ... You wait for 10 days for the result – which coincidentally came the day before my birthday.

I hadn't been accepted to enter training for ministry!

I was absolutely gutted – completely heartbroken and was so sure that this was what God was calling me to do, and yet I hadn't got it. I'd missed it. I'd got it wrong, I don't know ...

A few days later we went away camping for a week leading up to the Bank Holiday weekend at the end of May. We went camping near this little village, which was near a town.

I was still downcast and we went for a wander around the town, the town had a large church, and it was open and we went inside.

I wasn't really in the mood to go into a church but Leah insisted.

Once inside, after looking around Leah stood me at the front and said to me, somewhat firmly: "One day, you will be standing in a church like this, and you'll be ordained."

And today ... I'm standing in that same church, in that same spot! We were camping at a campsite I now drive past on the way to Fauls, just on the outskirts of Whitchurch called Green Lane Farm. And we'd come in here, to visit. I stood at the front of the church that day and I felt again a sense of God with me on this journey.

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Things moved on, I changed jobs to work for a Care Home, I became a Church Warden for a struggling, different church on our doorstep ... And I went back to an Advisory Bishops Panel, BAP. I was recommended for training, went to Durham, and here I am!

Throughout this time one Bible passage kept coming up.

Once Leah's Mum had written passages on stones, and given them to each of her children and their families – ours was this passage, Psalm 127.

I would listen to a sermon – it was that passage again ...

Even to the point where I was at College training and we were studying the same passage!

And it was the Psalm for this morning, Psalm 127. That's not coincidental by the way, I asked for it specially.

The first bit of phrasing: **“unless the Lord builds the house, the labourers labour in vain”...**

This spoke to me of the need to rely on God in all I do – I can labour, I can work, but it's in vain unless I'm doing so for the Lord – and sometimes I needed that reminder – when I was getting stressed about trying to sort things out or attempting to get things moving on what I thought was my calling into ministry it was a firm reminder to rely on God in things, not my own strength.

The same is true really of the second bit of phrasing: **“ unless the Lord keeps watch over the city, those who guard it watch in vain.”**

This also speaks of the need to rely on God, but also in those times of uncertainty, in those times of worry of fear it offers a perspective that focuses on God, and not on our own efforts.

And the third line: **“In vain you rise early, stay up late toiling for food to eat – for he grants sleep for those he loves.”** This was, and still is, a reality check for me – why should I force, and push and strain in my own direction, instead I need to rest and rely on God's leading – for he loves me.

And these are all true for all of you. All of us. All of us need to remember that It is God at work in the world and we are called to join in – we are called to discern what God is doing and to join in, not to labour and attempt to build structures in a way that we think we should.

All of us also need to constantly remember that God is the one we can trust – to protect and keep us.

Amidst times of great fear and uncertainty – like times of late perhaps – in those moments to trust God for he guards us – and we can't do it without him.

And I also think this Psalm points to a completely different way of living – a way where overwork is not the priority – work is good, and working for the Lord is important – but rising early and going to bed late sounds like a recipe for burnout! It's pushing against the prevailing winds of not resting, not stopping ... And all too easily we fall into this trap – but to have confidence to know your limits, when to stop when to rest – is so important in this busy world!

This Psalm for me is a constant reminder and assurance of God's presence – and also a constant reality check – Am I relying on God or is it just me again?

In the Gospel reading for today Jesus' authority is questioned by the Temple priests: **“ on what authority do you do these things? Divine or human?”**

If I was asked that question, if you were asked that question of what you were doing – are you doing it in human or divine authority I wonder what your answer would be? You know – it's not always easy to tell, perhaps until afterwards, if you've got this balance right but it's still an important check.

Jesus goes on to tell us a short parable, asking which of the two sons did the father's will – the one who said they would go and then didn't, or the one who said they wouldn't go and then did – which in many ways seems to sound a little like my own journey – doing the will of God is the important thing – seeking to do what God is calling you to do is highlighted as the key message the key point – the thing that the elders missed but others got right.