

It's customary for the winner of a beauty pageant to wear a sash. A bit more gaudy than this, but a sash nevertheless. In the church, the sash worn by deacons is the equivalent of L plates.....beware.... Terry may look like a vicar, but hasn't yet passed his test. The test of being the same person God called me to be both before and after I started to wear a clergy collar.

Last week I met with Bishop Olivia shortly before my ordination and she strongly suggested that being ordained will alter my relationships with both friends and strangers alike. I politely and diplomatically told her that I disagreed.

Ordination might go to my head; I might assume an air of moral or spiritual superiority; I might start to overtly wield the power and authority vested in me by the church. But I think there are three good and valid reasons why I hope not.

Firstly, I am not a newbie coming into this church. Our relationships have been established over decades in some instances, not hours or days as it would be if I was appointed curate in another church.

You have shared and witnessed my good times and bad, and there are more than a few of you who, as you have in the past, will politely tell me in the future when or if I get out of line. It's called healthy relationship.

Secondly I'm blessed with the wisdom and love of my wife and incumbent. The two jays as I call them, Jane and Jon. They will be the first to remind me that whatever I do, will only be done "by the help of God" as I affirmed on no less than 8 occasions on Tuesday. They know me better than any other living persons; that's called healthy relationship.

Thirdly, I don't believe in coincidence. The ordination liturgy spoke of people being drawn into the new life which God has

prepared for those who love him and guess what, the very first bible reading post ordination does exactly the same. In Isaiah's opening words:

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit”.

From a stump, a symbol of death, comes a shoot, a symbol of new life. A new life which will lead us to a place where a helpless child will no longer need to fear a dangerous animal, but will actually play and frolic with it.

The more I read through the Isaiah passage the more this came to mind: [Waitrose Christmas Ad]

By the way, there are other Christmas adverts available from other leading supermarkets, but for me the healthy relationship – that word again – the relationship between Excitable Edgar, the name of the dragon and Ava the little girl, symbolically echoes not only the Isaiah passage, but what sits at the heart of the Gospel story we preach in this church.

How more dangerous an animal can you get than a fire breathing dragon? Yet here he is excitedly – playing with the children. Harming them was the last thing on his mind. Did you notice Ava sitting all through the night outside Edgar's house?

Waiting in anticipation that Edgar will eventually come and she doesn't want to miss him..... This Advent we wait in anticipation of the one who came first as a baby and will come again a second time and we don't want to miss him.

Then there is the gift of the bread offered to restore a broken relationship and the wine so evident on the feasting table. Feasting and heaven interweave throughout the bible. And when the people around the feasting table see Edgar they duck down in fear.

Yet Edgar's peace offering of the lit Christmas pudding should remind us that we too have the ability to be generous; to spread warmth and to dispel fear and anxiety this Christmas; never mind the gospel truth that love casts out fear.

The opening sentence of Tuesday's liturgy said
“Deacons are called to work with the Bishop and the Priests with whom they serve as heralds of Christ's kingdom”.

So you may not be surprised to hear that the scene which resonates with me most is where Ava comes to the feasting hall, trumpet in hand, as a herald; announcing the good news. I believe that is what God has called me for - to proclaim and share the good news, but the fact that Ava can't blow the trumpet adequately only reminds me that I still haven't passed my clerical driving test.

Unlike, Jon, that is. He passed his test many years ago when he was a comparative young whipper snapper and all his years of accumulated wisdom, experience and downright determination to strive for excellence all came to fruition in Tuesday's service.

For the record, I'm not the only one who thought the service was an absolutely wonderful experience for those attending, including for those of a different faith or of no faith, I've received many messages of fulsome praise about the service saying exactly that.

But perhaps most telling is the email Jon and I received from my Diocesan Director of Ordinands, DDO, who is highly experienced in such matters, being responsible for organizing the usual annual ordination service each July at Oxford.

He wrote “Thank you both for the fantastic ordination service we had on Tuesday. The welcome from the folk was great – and all the contributions to the service from so many different people were much appreciated”. He should know what he is talking about.

It is most unusual for a Bishop not to give the sermon at an

ordination service, but Bishop Olivia explained that as this was a service set within a local context and Jon knew me so well, she wanted Jon to speak. I'm so glad she did.

For the record, let me say publicly that Jon's sermon was one of the best I've ever hear. One friend said to me ...wow, if I lived in Sunningdale I'd certainly be here every Sunday just to hear what he has to say.

Whilst Jon spoke about my faith journey throughout it was always subordinate to the message that he was preaching.....that we at Holy Trinity Sunningdale are seeking to get to the position where our faith is a constant living faith obeying Jesus' command that we love one another as he loved us.

Jon challenged everyone present to shrug off whatever might be stopping them becoming more fully the person God has called us to be. In other words how best can we learn to live loved and by doing so **show how much you care.**

The service didn't just happen; a huge amount of preparation was involved. The final order of service was 24 pages long and was draft no 12. It not only had to be constantly proof read, but then printed, folded and stapled. We wanted it to help church goers and non church goers alike to get the most out of the service. That shows how much you care.

The south transept was transformed over a number of weeks to provide an area which not only provided additional seating, a step up to the platform but had a fourth screen installed to enable those in that area to see what was on the main screens. That shows how much you care.

The flower team created wonderful floral decorations the equal of many a wedding display; the brass and silver were polished. Many people volunteered to provide a huge amount of mouth watering

and delicious canapés. That shows how much you care.

A serving team gave up over 6 hours of their day on Tuesday to receive and set out the trays of food and glasses and then with others handed them out after the service. Others gave lifts to people unable to get here unaided. That shows how much you care.

Two of my personal guests turned up 2 hours early, but told me of the fantastic way in which they were welcomed, sharing a cup of tea and chatting for the best part of an hour. That shows how much you care.

All that was necessary was for me to rock up on the night, but I hope I did so with a degree of obvious gratitude and expression of thanks acknowledging how much you care.

Finally, I have felt quite humbled by the most wonderful generosity you have all shown to me through the gifts that I have been given; not only for the very generous cheque but also:

The service leader's bible with a small B

These wonderful candlesticks

A specially commissioned plate dedicated to my ordination.

A specially commissioned painting simply titled – called.

All given and received with love.

Words are inadequate to say how much I feel loved and how much you care. My prayer is that I will prove sufficiently worthy for our healthy relationship to remain unchanged by this collar. That is the test before me and as I might have said on Tuesday...by the help of God, I will.