

Reflection for the Choral Eucharist celebrating the Anniversary of the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood

You did not choose me, but I chose you and I appointed you to go out and bear fruit – fruit that will last.

Just half of one verse from the Gospel appointed for today as we recall St Matthias the apostle, the one chosen by lot, to replace Judas Iscariot. Many of us will have said this verse as a response to the Benedictus at morning prayer.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and I appointed you to go out and bear fruit – fruit that will last.

We are all called into ministry and all called to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ in every moment of every day of our lives:- lay and ordained, of all gender, of all ages, of all backgrounds.

And some are discerned to have a calling into leadership, also lay and ordained, also of every gender, also from every background.

And some are called into a particular spiritual leadership into ordained ministry as deacons and some of those into the ordained priestly ministry.

Some are called to be consecrated as Bishops – and since 2014 in the Church of England the Episcopate has also been open to all genders.

2024 is therefore a significant year.

80 years ago, Florence Li Tim-Oi was ordained in Hong Kong in the face a great opposition – as she became the first women to be ordained priest in the Anglican Communion.

50 years ago, The Methodist Church admitted women as presbyters, recognising the equality of call of both women and men. I had the privilege of training alongside methodist brothers and sisters at Lincoln College 1990-93 and so began a life-long commitment to ecumenism.

30 years ago, The Church of England ordained women to the priesthood which is our main focus for today.

And as I've just mentioned 10 years ago in 2014 General Synod voted to consecrate women as Bishops.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and I appointed you to go out and bear fruit – fruit that will last.

A very short personal story of discerning a call. Just before I was ordained deacon in 1993 my mum told me she had always thought I would become a vicar's wife – because aged seven I used to play churches with my toys and would line them up so they could listen to me preaching sermons I had

apparently written and carefully prepared! Mum then added that she was wrong and I would be the vicar – not the vicars wife! I hadn't remembered this at all! – I was however very young when I first sensed a nudge from God aged only sixteen.

In 1994 I was still a young curate as I was ordained priest alongside other colleagues of all genders. This was in Bristol Cathedral a few months after our sisters such as Angela, who is here today, were ordained by Bishop Barry Rogerson. When I began training, I did not know if that would be possible, but I certainly did not have the long wait that many had.

So that is the looking back – but my friends we will have missed something of enormous significance if we only look back today -

You did not choose me, but I chose you and I appointed you to go out and bear fruit – fruit that will last.

For we are appointed to go out and bear fruit – fruit that will last!

I have the absolute privilege in my current role as Ministry Training Team Leader to support and encourage many people to develop their skills of mission and ministry, lay and ordained and especially to support Training Incumbents and Curates.

I see people grow in confidence. I see people learn from trying something new and it not quite working out, so they try again! I see people discovering gifts and skills they really didn't think they had – and it is an absolute joy.

I see people coming alongside others, sometimes in moments of great trauma and distress and sharing a simple and yet profound message of God's love.

And in these actions, we continue to strive to live and tell the story of Jesus Christ and to share God's love through our words and action to transform the unjust structures in society and to care for this incredible world in which we live.

So yes, let us look back over 10, 30, 50 and 80 years today – but let us do that only to look forward and recommit ourselves, - every single one of us – to share God's love however and whenever we can.

And let us recognise and use the gifts he has given us to grow his Church, not for any self interest but because everyone is welcome to belong and be part of this incredible amazing story. Amen

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