Good morning Emma.

Morning, Katie!

How are you?

I'm good, how are you?

I'm good too, and I'm really glad that you can join us today, and I'm really glad we haven't got commute anywhere we can do it all via camera, it's so much easier! So this interview. We want to know a little bit about you and life
and health and ministry and art and how they all come
together. So let's start with life. Tell us who is Emma?

So. Hi Emma, I'm married to Mike. We've been married nearly
25 years. We met at Manchester University.

We were both studying as engineers. Manchester is the most
amazing place. Yeah and so we met in Manchester,

I then went to Birmingham to do project management and we
landed somehow in Reading,

'cause that's the midpoint of where our jobs ended us up.
And we've been here yeah, 20-25 years

quarter of a century, oh Gee, I don't feel that old, that's
not possible, is it?

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And then I realise we've got a 16 year old daughter.

Oh, she's 16!

So I worked as an engineer, a project manager, a value and risk manager until she came along.

and then I had what I now know is a calling into ministry, but at the time I was absolutely sure

was a calling maybe into counselling. Did a degree in psychology when she was between birth and three

because that's obviously what new mums do. I mean honestly!

And then finally listened when everyone says it's a call
into ministry, Emma, really it is.

So I obviously went to my vicar and said this is nonsense, isn't it? And he said no.

And I went to vocations advisors and they agreed with my vicar. I cried a lot, essentially accepted that I was having a calling into licenced lay ministry.

Excellent, and that is the jargon here isn't it, LLM licenced lay ministry,

which means that as a layperson you have a particular calling on you to exercise a particular ministry.

Absolutely. So preaching, teaching and pastoral care are the three sections of lay ministry.
and I trained and realised in training I was definitely not fitting in the box.

I mean, I've never fit in any box in my life, let's be clear, but this wasn't working and I wasn't sure where I was sitting. I felt really called to outside the church to people who would never even deem to step foot in the church, and over the next few years, I realised there was this thing called pioneering and I was a pioneer. So out there rather than in here.

So out there rather than in here.
Out there meeting people who think church is a bit of a strange place.

Well, even more strange than sometimes we might think it is.

Indeed. And how about health? Because I know that
your health,

I guess when you made your marriage vows, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, like we all do,

we make them not having any clear what that might actually mean in the future. So how has health been for you?

So well, 3-4 years into pioneering, I got up from the sofa one evening and said to Mike, I feel funny.
And by the time I got to the top of the stairs was blind.

That was quite shocking.

So I'm not cool. I am legally blind, but as with most people who are legally blind, I have a bit of sight.

I have a small tunnel of blurry vision out of my right eye.

And then over the next year lost most of my mobility, so I'm the dangerous creature that is a blind wheelchair driver.

You've got a great power chair though.

I have a great power chair and I have amazing people around me who support me, and I don't let things stop me.

So that was a huge, uh, adapt...
Adjustment?

That's the word I'm looking for! And the reason my words go is because despite shielding, I caught COVID.

Thankfully survived COVID, but now have long COVID so it's an exciting life I'm leading.

You got the bingo card of chronic illness, haven't you? I mean, you're doing very well, top line’s filled in beautifully.

So on a day to day basis, if people are trying to understand kind of what a day a typical day or an average day, I know there probably isn't one but go with me, a typical day might look like just for you as Emma,
away from ministry for a minute. What might that look like?

Now with long COVID, that's 20 hours a day laid down. And even now I've got my feet up.

I'm reclined because if I sit up straight I lose my oxygen levels. I become massively fatigued exhaustion I've never experienced. Laid down I'm still creating, so I'm a creative person,

and I spend all my time laid down. I do a lot of reading, listening to books, but I love to write lots of poetry

and I paint on my iPad, which I love.
And you are quite famous for your art. Yes, you are famous.
Go on name drop, name drop.

58
01:05:37,239 --> 01:05:38,760
Name drop!

59
01:05:38,760 --> 01:05:40,719
Yes, you've been on TV!

60
01:05:40,719 --> 01:05:45,599
Oh, I suppose I have. Well, yes, Grayson Perry. I mean that
was the most amazing experience

61
01:05:45,599 --> 01:05:53,239
and that was before I caught COVID and the, well, experience
of speaking to Grayson about what it's like

62
01:05:53,239 --> 01:06:00,639
being a blind person and loving art was amazing, and he
spoke about creating because you love it

63
01:06:00,639 --> 01:06:07,880
and naming - he said you are an artist. Name yourself as an
artist and keep doing it because you love it
and it will speak to people. And when I caught COVID that really stuck with me.

I was creating in the hospital. The hospital thought this was amazing.

And that affirmation that we're all creative. We all have something to share, and to do it for ourselves.

I mean, that's the reason I create. It's for me.

Now there are some folks out there not in the conference 'cause we're all fabulous,

but there are some folk out there in the wider society who struggle with the idea that we can be disabled
or have chronic conditions, however, we want to describe ourselves, but also have ministry.

And that one doesn't need fixing or curing in order to do the other. So you can be blind,

you can have long COVID, you can live with all the various things that you live with, and have a genuine ministry.

They would say, surely you want to fix those medically before you can be of use as a minister.

And in my case, cerebral palsy surely gets in the way. How can you be a priest with cerebral palsy?

So how have you brought the two together in terms of arts and ministry and disability and chronic illness?
That's a massive question.

Good luck!

Thank you.

Wrestling with ministry right at the very start was all for me about being affirmed that God was calling me for me. And that has struck me all the way through and I was when I first lost my sight and became disabled, the amazing Bishop Andrew was so affirming my vicar was affirming. You are called for you. God knows what you're going through.
God always knew what you were going to go through. God is beside you. God is leading you.

And I just keep that in mind. It's not what I do, it's who I am.

and I'm not sure how I'd get through any of it without God, and I want to share that,

and I believe sharing that is a huge part of my ministry, to be able to say to people, yeah,

life is really rubbish. I mean, let's be clear, it is hugely rubbish at times.

But I feel so loved by God. I feel inspired by God and I know God is there,
loving everyone who's in need and feeling desperate or hurt
or just as if they're missing something.

And lots of people in the world struggle. So to have
somebody who is in ministry struggling

speaks to them that they are good enough and loved and
wanted.

So here's a curveball question for you. Supposing - have you
seen the Matrix film where there's the blue pill and the
red pill,

and one of them is stay exactly as you are and the other one
is everything changes and becomes a different story.

Supposing you have that choice, you went to bed tonight and
God whispered in your ear,
tomorrow morning you can wake up as you are or tomorrow morning you can wake up

and be able to see again, to sit up again without the oxygen problems,

maybe the long COVID is a different question from disability, but to actually go back to your pre-blind life,

what do you think your reaction might be?

If it meant everything I’ve learned and everything I’d gained and all the healing of my soul went away with my sight loss, then absolutely not. It happens to lots of us disabled people,
people on the street offering to pray for us and we'll be
healed. And I say wait a minute, I am healed.

God has been with me every step of the way. I was healed of
the grief of it. I was healed of the anger of it.

I'm so much calmer, closer to God, so much more centred. I
value life so much more.

It may seem slower and less, but actually it's richer and
deeper.

I would not go back to how I was.

And that is a good note to end on from my point of view, so
I'm going to say Emma, thank you so much
for giving us this bit of time and letting us have just a
glimpse into your life and your ministry and your faith.

108
01:10:49,520 --> 01:10:50,840
So thank you for being with us.

109
01:10:50,840 --> 01:10:51,720
Thank you.