

Ordination sermon

It all begins with the feet..... beautiful upon the mountains as they run sure-footed to declare peace, bring good news, announce salvation and proclaim, 'Your God reigns'. 'Beautiful', a word which appears in the Song of Solomon as an expression of physical attraction to one's lover, is usually restricted to more likely physical attributes such as the cheek or the mouth. In our first reading it's applied to the feet – mundane, functional, often not attractive at all. But here they *are* beautiful because they embody the love, grace and mercy of God rushing to overwhelm a waiting, searching, suffering world. The prophet *speaks* of a new dawn, a chorus of singing, a moment of great joy. The prophet *anticipates* the light-filled sky and angel voices that will signal the word made flesh.

Today, in this holy place, with voices which also sing for joy, we celebrate the coming of two more pairs of beautiful feet. We thank God for Anne and Christopher, who have already travelled over great distances, usually in the right direction (that's for you Anne), sometimes by still waters, at other times through some adversity. They've journeyed with loved ones, Jenny, Christopher, their families, friends, spiritual companions, encouragers and challengers. And now they will be ordained and sent out alongside fellow travellers, to continue to tell the story of God's love with every step they take. But before they do up their laces they're called to be still in the presence of God; to rest in the one in whose image they are being formed; to hear his word; declare their belief in him; pray earnestly for the gift of the spirit and an enlarging of the heart. And that pattern, practised today, is a good model to imitate before each subsequent journey....to be still, to rest in God, to read scripture, and to pray for the gift of the spirit and an enlarging of the heart.

Take my feet and let them move, swift and beautiful for thee, says the hymn. But it's not all about feet. Christopher and Anne are also to be sentinels, to use their eyes to watch for what is God is doing in the world, their ears to listen, their voices to encourage and teach, their hands to comfort and bless, their hearts to love and inspire. All that they are, their gifts and strengths, weaknesses and frailties, will be used to baptise, make disciples and build up the body of Christ.

And here's the heart of the matter. Whilst the letter to the Ephesians celebrates the diversity of gifts that God gives to his children, it reminds us that these gifts are not to be accumulated and stored, but used for the building up of God's kingdom on earth. Over the past couple of years, I've got to know Anne really well. Christopher and I go back a little way too. Here are two gifted people, different in so many ways, yet sharing a passion to get out there and crack on. And here we all are, so different to one another, yet blessed with gifts that equip us together for the work of ministry. The Greek word for 'equip' is a lovely little word that literally

means the setting of a bone. It is only as we are formed to be more and more like Christ, literally shaped and set in his image, that our gifts can be used to help the whole body grow and flourish, and so overwhelm the world with love. *We must grow up into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.* As we thank God for Anne and Christopher today, please thank God for the person he is forming you to be, the gifts he has blessed you with, and the difference you make in the world.

It might begin with the feet.....but for me it ends with the hands. The eleven disciples go to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus has directed them. And there, depleted by betrayal, storm-tossed by loss, death and the shock of new life, seized by adoration and doubt, perhaps in equal measure, they kneel with empty hands outstretched. Or that's how I like to imagine them anyway. And Jesus fills their empty hands with all that they need to run, speak, listen, love, teach, baptise and bless. When trying to find words to speak of priestly ministry, I often return to the language of holding. Priests are called to hold, lightly and gently, the story of God and his people. They are called to hold the invisible threads and treasures of a community. They are called to hold precious space as people explore and grow, encountering God and one another. They are called to hold the hurting, the joyful and the everyday in prayer. They are called to hold the body of Christ, broken in love for the world and his people.

And when their arms start to ache they're called to lay it all down, and return to Galilee with empty hands outstretched. To hear again these words: *Remember I am with you always.* And then, and only then, to run sure-footed alongside all God's pilgrim people, beautiful upon the mountains, embodying his grace and love and mercy.

Hilary Dawson 25th September 2016

