

Bishop Ruth's Readers' Charge Michaelmas 2022

Each of you here are responding to a call from God to this ministry of Reader. For some of you, the public journey is just beginning, for others, this is the next chapter, having served elsewhere. For each of you the story of your call to this ministry will be unique. In our service this afternoon we will hear readings from Scripture which speak of God's call, firstly to Samuel, the young boy, who initially failed to recognise the voice of God. Then Jesus speaking to his disciples and giving his own 'charge' to them, a call to love that is costly, a recognition of friendship with Jesus, which is not mere service.

This morning, you have been reflecting with David Runcorn on a world that needs remaking and renewing. In the Genesis story we hear that what God created was found to be good, very good. In recent times it is as if that world, our world, has turned upside down. Things have happened which we had not expected or predicted and for which we were not prepared. We can point to a virus, to conflicts and natural disasters, to political leaders, as being responsible for this but that would be to see ourselves as separate from the world in which we live too. We share in some of the responsibility, both for where we are and for what can be done about it now.

It's very easy to focus ministry upon the 'doing' of it, the service to which we are called, whether one of preaching and teaching, or expressed in other practical ways. My charge to you today focuses on the 'being'. I want to leave you with three things to reflect on, in this call to Reader ministry.



Firstly, the call to **be an angel**. This isn't about seeking to be perfect people but rather a recognition that in all we say and do, in the person we are, we are called to be angels. The feast of Michaelmas, September 29th, St Michael and All Angels, marks the date of my ordinations, my call to ministry, first as deacon 26 years ago, then priest 25 years ago, then Bishop 7 years ago. It's a feast that reminds us of the ministry of angels, as messengers and truth-tellers of the glory of God. Angels point to a hope beyond this world, found in the person of Christ. We are called to be heralds, tellers of the story of God's love for the world. And surely now more than ever the world needs us to be bringers of such hope!

Many in our communities are feeling the anxiety of an uncertain future. There's a dis-ease in our society, inequality is increasing, anger is rising, mental wellbeing is being affected, and we are seeing signs of civil unrest as a result. This is a moment for those of us with hope in Christ to share that hope with those around us. We can only do that authentically if we live out that hope ourselves.

I am not asking you to become raging optimists, always being positive, or avoiding realism. But rather that we should be living in the strength of the knowledge of God's love for us and his ability to overcome all that is evil, sinful and wrong in our world.

The coming of Christ into the world was all about God wanting to come amongst us, to share in the pain and vulnerability that we know, **and** to bring us hope through his death, renewing and remaking the relationship we can have with him.

Being an angel is about living and telling that story of God's love to all who need to hear! It's about reminding people of a story that has been forgotten, finding fresh ways to share it, helping folk to understand it in their own language and context. It means not just preaching it but living it.

This leads me on to the call to **be you**, the one God has called. Only you can fulfil the ministry to which God has called you. He is not asking you to be someone different. Your role as Reader may mean people will perceive you in a different way but I hope that they will each continue to see you as you are, with all your gifts and foibles!

There is always a danger for us to feel a sense of 'imposter syndrome'. None of us feel worthy of the ministry to which we are called. However long we have been engaged in it there's always more to learn and we realise just how far short of the ideal we fall. Just as we need to declare the salvation of God who turns us around and renews and remakes us, so we need to acknowledge our humanity, flawed as it is. God had made you in his image. He likes you this way! Yes, there are attitudes and behaviours that need to be transformed but in essence we are whom God made us. And made to live in communion with others who bring their own uniqueness which contributes those things we cannot offer.

Finally, I want to encourage you to **be still**. I am grateful for those who have ensured you have had some time to retreat and I hope you will make that a regular habit. We all need to find moments of stillness to hear the call of God afresh to us. Note it was when Samuel was asleep that he heard God! And as we look at other Biblical narratives we hear similar stories. Remember Elijah? After the excitement of seeing God at work on Mount Carmel, he takes fright when Jezebel threatens him and runs away. He's at his lowest, depressed, exhausted and fearful. God provides food and sleep and time away for him to rediscover the still, small voice of God's love and direction.



That stillness is not just something to do on an irregular, 'when we feel the need of it' basis, but rather each, and every day. How can we share the word of God with others if we are not listening for it for ourselves daily? You will each have different ways of making that space, different forms of prayer that you will use. Make sure it is not just a one-sided conversation however. Pouring our hearts out to God in intercession is a vital part of prayer but do make sure he has time to share his heart with you too!

This year our "Dwelling" passage across our diocese has been from Philippians 4. I share a few words from that passage with you as a prayer for you today.

'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'

With thankfulness for your ministry

+ Ruth

