

**Sermon by the Venerable Sue Field
on the occasion of her installation
as Archdeacon Pastor
at Coventry Cathedral on 18 March 2018**

I want to begin by expressing my thanks to a number of people

- to all those who have put so much work and thought into the preparation of this service
- to Bishop Christopher, Bishop John and others who have given me such a warm welcome to the Diocese
- to my family, friends and former colleagues – some of whom have difficult journeys today
- to the wonderful people of St Mary in Charnwood and Emmanuel, Loughborough amongst whom I have served for the past nearly 20 years.

Thank you so much for being here today – your presence, prayers and support mean so much to me.

Over the past few months I have lost track of the number of people who have joked about me being sent to Coventry but I am glad to be here. This Cathedral is a very special place for me. My parents brought me here when I was quite young and I remember being struck by the beautiful windows and the Sutherland tapestry. In 1987, just a few weeks after my ordination as Deacon, I sang in a performance of the War Requiem here to mark the 25th Anniversary of the opening of the Cathedral. As the light faded and darkness began to fall, the ruins of the old Cathedral could be seen behind the west window, adding a poignancy to the performance – and a coach load of us from Loughborough came to the 50th anniversary performance in 2012. In 1992, I gathered with a group of other women deacons as we looked forward with hope and expectancy to the time when women could be ordained as priest. We gathered in the old cathedral and moved here, using the buildings to convey that sense of death and resurrection and the hope of new possibilities.

The past few weeks culminating in this service, mark a huge time of transition for me as I leave behind a familiar Diocese and place where I have lived for 27 years and move into a new role and a new Diocese. I look forward with excitement, and some trepidation, to learning a new way of working and to building new relationships, and all of that is part of what it means to be Christian

disciples. If we are to follow the call of God on our lives, that will inevitably mean endings and beginnings, letting go and trusting God to give us all that we need for the next stage of our journey.

Relationship is at the heart of our Christian faith. We believe in a God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit so relationship forms the essence of who God is but, as we see, particularly in John's gospel, it is a relationship into which we are all called. God so loved the world – that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life – God so loved the world.

Tomorrow is the feast of Joseph of Nazareth and so our readings for this evening are those set for the eve of that feast. In our first reading from the book of the prophet Hosea, we see that relationship at a point of strain. We witness a God who is struggling with the fact that Israel is walking away from him – this is the child he has loved but who is turning away and following other gods. Throughout this passage we get a sense of the pain of a parent – a compassionate God who cares and longs for Israel to do the right thing - a God for whom relationship with his people is essential, a self-giving God whose love is sacrificial.

And in our second reading, we hear the story we heard a few weeks ago at the Feast of Candlemas, the story of Joseph and Mary taking a 12 year-old Jesus to the temple for the Passover feast. This is one of the few glimpses we get of Joseph – this together with the story from Matthew of the angel appearing to him to tell him of the birth of Jesus. In our reading today, we again hear the angst of a parent – this time of parents who have mislaid their child. After three days, they find Jesus sitting among the teachers and when they ask the question that all parents might ask - why have you treated us like this – Jesus seems to not quite understand why they have been anxious and searching for him and instead asks them why they didn't know that he would be in his father's house. We see here something of the juxtaposition of the humanity and the divinity of Jesus – but focusing today on Joseph, that must have been hard. We don't know to what extent Joseph at this point understood who Jesus is but he might have been very aware that his role as the earthly father of Jesus was an unusual one.

Jesus here displays his commitment and his call to serve his heavenly Father and we see something of the call of Joseph to bring his son up to follow that call on his life, and also Joseph's seeming acceptance of that role. He was to bring Jesus up so that God's will could be done. Joseph's call was to enable Jesus to fulfill his Father's purposes and not to get in the way.

Each of us as baptized Christians will have a particular call, but through our baptism we share a common call to be witnesses to that love of God which is there for every person and like Joseph, we need to be obedient to that call even when it is difficult and costly.

10 days ago, Archbishop Justin Welby, who has spent much of his ordained ministry in this Diocese and latterly in this Cathedral, published his second book 'Reimagining Britain'. I haven't read the whole book yet but I was struck by a paragraph in his final chapter where he talks about the Church. He says this:- for Christians, the principal role of the churches is to be witnesses to the truth of Jesus Christ. As such, they are to seek to draw those who do not know the love of God who created all people and things into confident experience of that love. They do that by their prayers, their speaking and their own love expressed in action. If the churches are not witnesses to Christ, they are nothing, but as witnesses they are called to speak about the daily lives and experience of the society in which they find themselves. Faith cannot be sealed off from daily life.'

God so loved the world – each of us, whether our calling is to be an Archdeacon, a volunteer, a vicar, a teacher – whatever our particular calling is – we share a common call as baptized Christians to point those with whom we come into contact with, to the overwhelming love of God for all people, seen most powerfully in the death and resurrection of Jesus. May God give us his strength and courage as we seek to do that day by day.