

RECTOR'S PINT

There was a certain comic element - at least to me – in early June, when I attended three jubilee lunches, all happening at the same time! On the day, we had also accepted an invitation to a celebration tea that afternoon, so I was given strict instructions by Cath not to eat anything before then! It was a form of mild torture, but I managed to arrive at the tea intact, and it was well worth the wait! It was also a delight to see people coming together in such a joyful manner.

Times of celebration are so important, and there will be a significant marker in my own life on July 5th, as thirty years ago, on that date, I was ordained as a deacon, in Gloucester Cathedral. The following year I was ordained as a priest, but it is the ordination as deacon that stands out for me. In the Church of England, as well as in the Catholic Church (the Church of England was once Roman Catholic!) all those who become priests are first ordained as deacons. It is a serving role, and a reminder that whatever comes afterwards, that calling never stops. The best advice I was ever given about the role was 'never stop moving chairs'.

Much has happened in the Church over those thirty years. Most significantly, when I was ordained, women could not become priests. That took another twenty-one years, until the first woman, Libby Lane was consecrated as bishop in 2015. Personally, I found it hard to comprehend why it took so long.

I first served as a curate in Cheltenham, and then as a vicar in Cinderford in the Forest of Dean before moving in 2002 to Hughenden in Buckinghamshire where I was vicar until moving here in 2015. I have acted as a vocations advisor and have had two spells as an Area Dean. For me though, the thing that has remained constant is parish ministry, in all its variety.

There have been plenty of challenges, and there have been some particularly difficult and dark times, but there also remains much to celebrate, and I am still here! My faith has had its ups and downs, but I remain convinced of the central realities of what I try to proclaim every week, of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the grace, mercy, justice, hope, and love of God we see fully revealed in him. There is so much more I could say, but space does not permit, so I'm including a prayer for all those who are at the start of their journey with the Church. This is the ordination collect that will be said by the bishops across the land in ordination services at the beginning of July:

God our Father, Lord of all the world,
through your Son, you have called us into the fellowship
of your universal Church:
hear our prayer for your faithful people
that in their vocation and ministry
each may be an instrument of your love,
and give to your servants now to be ordained
the needful gifts of grace;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Simon