



Grafted into the Tree of Life

Ordination Service 2016

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Isaiah 61:1-4

Matthew 16:13-23

The scriptures that we have just heard spoken, are fulfilled, enlivened, made flesh once more amongst us.

Jesus is quite clear in our Gospel today that it is him who builds the church, not us. Building the church is Christ's job – we are given lots of other jobs (and we will hear them in the commitments made in this service), but building the Church, that is the work of Jesus. Today we witness and testify to the truth that it is Jesus who builds the church not us, because we gather to hear testimony that the living Christ is at work in the lives of women and men calling them into the family Kingdom business, known lovingly as God's church. And we have come from the four winds, from around the world, to say Amen to that!

There are two things that I want to say to us today. Firstly I want to say the same thing, but to say it in different ways to the different parts of our family gathered here. And then I want to say something else and say it in the same way to us all.

The thing that I want to say, but to say in different ways is this: Respect the roots of the tree whose fruits you enjoy.

The first group of people that I want to say this to, is our Ordinands. Today you are grafted into something other than yourself. Who you are, the threads that make up your story, change today because of the tree that God is grafting you into. You have heard Jesus ask you to die to some parts of yourself and to align the life-giving flow of God's Spirit within you to the flow of God's life-giving Spirit within this particular Church family. And that alignment has and will cost you aspects of your identity, story and self. As you continue to let Jesus align you in the way

that is necessary for that delicate grafting process to work, let your consciousness expand to both the fruits and the roots of this tree of life. There are real fruits of belonging, privilege, possibilities, people that are given to you today. Receive those fruits from the hands of the God who loves you and who loves the people who will eat of those fruits with you and through you. There are also deep roots here that you must draw on. Roots that go very deep. And your respect for these roots must go deep too. In fact, your consciousness and attention must be to go deeper and deeper, to travel back through time and through space along the sinews of this root structure to find the nutrients that will truly nourish. Know the roots of this tree, which is your tree and always go deeper, go further back, lean into the depths of our histories, because in them you will also find the pathways of our future. Respect the roots of the tree whose fruits you enjoy.

The second group of our family that I want to speak to is to those who are already ordained. To those of us who have also heard the Living Christ call us to the front lines of the Kingdom family business. Today we receive the fruits, the grace, the gifts of others who come to stand beside us in this work; our orchard gets a bit bigger today. We must respect the roots of the trees whose fruits we enjoy. The people who today repeat words that we ourselves have said are not called to repeat the footsteps that we have trodden. To presume that these people come to do entirely as we have done is arrogant and therefore misguided. We, who receive the joy of family given in these people, particularly in our laying hands together, have a responsibility to listen and lean into the constantly re-creative newness of what Christ is doing. We must hear and learn from the stories of Christ's call in the lives of these people, so that we can perceive afresh the church that Jesus is building. This is why we all must be here in this service of ordination. And why if we cannot be part of this service we must ask permission from, and make apology to, our Bishop, who is the symbol of our unity. We must do this because who **we** are changes because of the events of this day. After today **we** are no longer the same. We have been made new and if we do not respect the roots of the trees whose fruits we enjoy, we will not be able

to perceive this newness and therefore perceive the creativity of Christ at work in our collective being. We must respect the roots, know the stories, ask the questions, lean into the calls of those proclaiming their alignment into us today, so that the life of the Holy Spirit can flow freely between us and make us one body.

And the third group that I want to speak to is those who are the family and friends of those being ordained today. For some of you, this may be your first time in a church (I can't actually say Anglican church today!). You are here with respect and love for the person close to you. They will change because of today and the things that you love and respect about them will probably grow deeper and more beautiful as time goes on. You will find that their capacity to be with you in your most joyful and most sorrowful moments in life will be amplified as a result of the newness that they put on today. And that consolation and celebration will be a fruitfulness that you can increasingly enjoy. And so, respect the roots of the tree whose fruits you enjoy. Those fruits are possible because of costly calls and decisions about priorities, about what these people have chosen and will choose to be alive to and die to. Respect the roots of the trees whose fruits you enjoy. But also know this, you are part of their root system too. They will need your ongoing love and grace to feed them as they feed others with themselves. Your friendship and family love and care for them is important (for all who live in God live in love and God lives in them) and so we, as a church family, thank you for the sustaining role that you will and must play in their lives, because the fruits of their calling will be supported by the roots of your love. I honour you for your presence here and I offer you respect and gratitude today too.

And so to the one thing that I want to say in the same way to all of us. Respect takes intention and focus and understanding. I wouldn't want us to be so consumed with those demands that we forget to consume the fruits. So the thing that I want to say in the same way to us all is this: Taste and see that God is good. Taste and see that the God is good.

There is a part of our Anglican liturgy around communion, our family meal, that is known as the prayer of humble access, but affectionately

sometimes called the humble grumble. It begins with the words, “we do not presume to come to your table merciful Lord trusting in our own righteousness but in your great mercy. We are not worthy so much as to gather the crumbs from under your table.” Jesus is always inviting us to sit and eat well with him. Christ assures us that God wants and longs to sit and eat with us at the Divine banquet table. To fellowship with the diverse and wonderful companionship of God is a great banquet feast. Yet often, I think, we do sit under the table, not always realising that that is where we have chosen to reside, and we gather up crumbs and think that they are meals, when they are not. The thing about divine crumbs is that they are really good and you can feel as though you are sustained by them. That moment of peace in a sunset calm evening. That touch of friendship and support. That grace of letting someone go and not containing them in your bitterness. All these things and so, so much more are taste of divinity. But they are not whole meals. The people today declaring their commitment, alignment with the way of Jesus and the people of Jesus (the broken and beautiful people of Jesus that they are saying will be their people from this day forth) are also saying that they have heard Jesus’ invitation and will choose to sit with Christ at the table and eat a proper meal – a proper thanksgiving feast. Now even in ministry it is easy to slip off the chair (or maybe never climb into it) and find yourself under the table snatching at crumbs again and maybe not even fully realise we have done so, because, as I have said, those divine crumbs are just so good. And it is easy to be busy with business and lose perspective as to whether we are truly about the family Kingdom business, or whether we have set our minds on human things rather than divine things.

Jesus says: Come to me if you are hungry, come to me if you are thirsty, pull up a proper seat at the divine table of fellowship by giving me your everything, make this banquet table your home, leave all other attachments behind, choose to feed here, choose to serve here, choose to belong here and you will taste and see, again and again and again that God is good.