

Let The Induction of the Rev Robin Ruder Celiz as Rector of St Helen's, Surrey
Tuesday, February 7th 2023

**The Reverend Stephen Rowe, Rector of the Anglican Parish of the Church of the Epiphany,
Surrey and Regional Dean of Peace Arch**

***Gracious God, by your grace alone we are accepted and called to your service. Strengthen us
by your Holy Spirit and make us worthy of our calling, Amen***

First I would like to thank Bishop John and Robin, the incoming rector, for inviting me to preach this evening. It remains to be seen as to whether either of them still think this was a good idea over the next few minutes. In other news it is good to see a great collection of clergy with us for this service. This speaks to the support and encouragement that Robin brings to this parish.

Words from the second reading ...

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

(Romans 12 verses 9-12)

The arrival of a new rector is a moment for both the priest and the parish to begin to get to know each other. For the priest it is the opportunity to get to know the parish, its people, and St Helen's ways of doing things, and for the parishioners to get to know their new rector and his way of doing things.

It will be easier to build relationships now we no longer have all restrictions in place that started in March 2020. However, church life is still challenging for all of us as we continue to move forward and figure out our common life as we emerge from the pandemic.

Robin, I can tell you this is a diverse and vibrant congregation with many energetic parishioners. They have been active in supporting refugees making their home in Canada. St Helen's has been a core part of the Tri-Parish Annual Service and Picnic in Bear Creek Park, with St Michael's, Epiphany and latterly with Christ the Redeemer. This will resume in June after a three-year hiatus. Also, as a group of parishes we have met for Quiet Mornings, social events, and support one another by regular meetings. St Helens.

It is good this evening that one of St Helen's recent clergy is back in her new role as Executive Archdeacon. How appropriate it is that Archdeacon Philippa should return to this parish for her first induction.

St Helen's, I can tell you that Robin came to Canada from South Africa where his diocesan bishop went by the name of Desmond Tutu. Bishop John no pressure.

Robin is known for his love of candy and chocolate, and I hear his kids know to guard their Halloween stash very carefully. Robin tells people he isn't an animal person but tends to be the first to pick up the family dog when she looks appealingly at him. He isn't too fond of heights but ensured Amelia got to go on all the rides she wanted on a visit to *Playland*. You will get to know him as your priest and pastor over the coming months and years.

The first reading speaks of Jeremiah being known intimately from birth by God; and implies that God knows each of us in the same way. Jeremiah, in common with many characters in Hebrew Scripture, was reluctant to be a prophet, but God is not intimidated by Jeremiah's reluctance. As followers of Christ perhaps we sometimes feel the same way, but God assures us that when we act in accordance with God's will, our needs will also be supplied. God knows us and guides us in the same intimate way.

In the letter to the Romans, we are reminded that the call of those who follow Christ is to be living sacrifices; people who seek to discern the will of God rather than being conformed to the world.

The passage urges that our love be genuine, that we reject evil and hold onto all that is good. We are called to excel in respecting and honouring one another. We aspire to be hopeful, patient in suffering and to be enthusiastic in our work for Christ as well as passionate in serving God. We are urged to contribute to the community and offer hospitality to those outside the church.

The church consists of people who are united in Christ as members of one body, but who have many and varied gifts to offer for its ministry. We do not need everyone to have the same function, and it is the role of the church to discern what gifts people have and how they can be used for God and the common good.

The gospel also speaks of sacrifice, as a way to love another, the new commandment. . As one commentator suggests, (Osvaldo Vena), as we follow Christ we are called to be obedient to the commandments of God and by self-giving. By doing this we abide in Christ's love and remain connected to him. Jesus models love for one another and calls the disciples friends. The love he shows for them he trusts, they will offer to one another. He also wants disciples to care for those outside the community as well as inside. In this way the world might be transformed by the sacrificial love Jesus showed to us. Once more this gives us insights into how God wants us to live as part of the body of Christ. This relates to our individual service, but also the way we might live and work together as a body.

As visitors to the parish this evening, it is our prayer that the partnership between priest and parish may develop and grow as the Body of Christ here in furthering the work of God in this

area of Surrey. The bishop initiates this ministry formally at this service this evening. All of us hope and pray for the development of a partnership that continues to flourish in this parish which has been in ministry for over a hundred years.

This is not the easiest time to be the church and we face challenges, especially as we rebuild following the pandemic. How we face what is ahead of us, and our attitude to it, will make all the difference.

Henri Nouwen comments on the passage from Romans that is our text this evening. He says this; in reference to the final words:

I am convinced we can choose joy. Every moment we decide to respond to an event or a person with joy instead of sadness. When we truly believe that God is life and only life, then nothing need have the power to draw us into the sad realm of death. To choose joy does not mean to choose happy feelings or an artificial atmosphere of hilarity. But it does mean the determination to let whatever takes place bring us one step closer to the God of life.

So, the word for both parish and priest tonight as the outset of this new ministry is from St Paul ...

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.



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