Re-commissioning of Revd Nick Green

12.9.15

‘He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him’

Our Service this evening – the re-commissioning of Nick as a Church Army Officeer – celebrates and affirms that work of evangelism. It’s the great tradition of John the Baptist who came to bear witness to the one who would come after him – to proclaim the coming of Christ and to call people to repentence. And St Paul declares the centrality of faith – but reminds us that faith needs to be proclaimed. It needs those who are called to proclaim it and respond in obedience.

I was delighted when Nick told me that he had decided to accept the invitation to receive back his Church Army Commission. I know that he thought and prayed deeply about that. In these moments, the question is, ‘Is this something of the past which I have now left behind – or do I carry it forward as a guiding principle of my life wherever the call of God may lead me?’ And I think it is the latter. So there is in our worship this evening more than a touch of the gospel of reconciliation – a reintegrating of Nick’s calling to be an evangelist with his ministry as Rector of St Mary’s, Dunbane. And what is the gospel if it is not about reconciliation – the breaking down of the barriers between us and the breaking down of the barriers between God and his people.

But there is more to this. There seems to have been a time in the life of the church when decisions tended to be presented in binary – or adversarial – or straightforward ‘yes and no’ terms. I constantly meet the legacy of that in my own ministry. And I think that the time when the Church Army said to its evangelists that if they sought ordination in the church they would have to give up their commission as evangelists. It had to be one or the other – it couldn’t be both and.

I believe passionately that there are many circumstances in which both/and is just what we need and what the gospel requires. And my experience is that much of the energy which we need comes when we bring things together rather than keeping them apart. Wasn’t the ministry of Jesus like that – healing, teaching, feeding, caring – all wrapped up together? As Nick goes about his ministry in Dunblane – caring, teaching, shaping worship, building relationships in the community – what could be more creative than that he brings to that the heart and passion of an evangelist?

So it’s going to be both/and for Nick. And I think it’s going to be inside and outside the church. The Priest and Pastor is at the heart of the community of God’s people. The evangelist is with those without faith – the evangelist is often outside – like John the Baptist, the voice crying in the wilderness.

So Nick the Rector – and Nick the evangelist – bring together that inside/outside understanding of the church. The tendency of the church to tame and domesticate is offset by the call of the evangelist to be with those who are not part of the church.

This is a really important moment. I am delighted and honoured to be part of it. I am delighted to be part of the growing partnership between the Church Army and the Scottish Episcopal Church. I pray that God will bless us as Church and Church Army do both/and and inside/outside in his name.