Institution at Cupar and Ladybank

24th February, 2017

Sermons at Institution Services are often preached by an old friend in ministry of the new Rector. The old friend comes to say that Roy is deeply rooted in faith, that he is a diligent and hard-working servant of his Lord, that he loves people, that he preaches sermons which are biblically-rooted and expository but which also communicate with fresh clarity, that he is a missional leader who gives people confidence to be where Jesus already is out in the world.

Roy didn’t ask for that. Roy is, I am sure, all of the above and more. Indeed we have reason to believe that he is. But what Roy wanted at this moment was welcome – welcome which recognises that he is here because he is following a calling – welcome which roots him and his ministry – and his family life - in this context here in Cupar and Ladybank.

People wonder what the new Rector will be like – and whether he will fit in. And the implication of that question is that he comes to belong in a context which is essentially static. But God’s faithful people are here praying and praising, serving and caring, connecting with other churches in outreach to the community. Nothing here is static. St Paul tells us that Roy will belong here. Varieties of gifts but the same Lord. There are all sorts of manifestations of the Spirit. But it is the same spirit working in each one. So Roy’s Brummie accent will add something distinctive here. So will his sense of humour. So will his kindness. But in the end what will make him truly part of this congregation and community is the fact that he serves the same Lord and that the same Spirit works in him.

Roy and I had a talk earlier in the week. Roy’s approach to ministry is to be very much ‘out there’. Out there and visible on foot in the community. Out there involved and contributing. Out there working with others. It about being as Matthew’s gospel says, ‘Salt and Light’ for the world. Some of us carry a phrase from a sermon preached long ago by Austin Farrer – that we are called to be walking sacraments. As Roy walks around this community – and as you go out into the community with him – you become walking sacraments. What that means is that those who meet you, are encouraged, supported and helped by you to experience a meeting not just with Roy and the congregation. But with Christ himself.

Churches and congregations are for all sorts of understandable reasons sometimes preoccupied with their own lives. There is the budget and the fabric. There are expectations both reasonable and unreasonable from people. There is a concern about the future – about finding people who will help to sustain the congregation into the future.

But todays readings are about the reality and depth of your experience of God – and how you share that experience with others. Or to use different language … God has called Roy here. He has given you a big hearted priest who believes in being salt and light. And you are called to be a big-hearted community of faith in whom others can see the love of God and the spirit of God at work

My God bless Roy in this new ministry – and may you and he be blessed and enriched as you become salt and light for the world.