Carol’s Ordination

‘Teach me my God and King

In all things thee to see

And what I do in anything

To do it as for thee

Carol and I share a love of C16 Welsh born George Herbert’s poetry and hymns. The attraction is in two things. First with clarity and economy he expresses the deepest things in the simplest language – particularly the simplicity of single=syllable words. – We might write off somebody who speaks in monosyllables as emotionally stunted, this is different. This comes with a limpid clarity rooted in deep spirituality. It is as Isaac Walton said, ‘ "*such hymns and anthems as he and the angels now sing in heaven"*

It is profoundly Anglican that we should find some of our most memorable expressions of faith in our hymns – the faith which we sing in community. Martyn Percy – who came to our Clergy Conference a couple of years ago – said that ‘Anglicanism is a community of being, love, thought and worship rather than being a definitive body that has achieved mutually agreeable confessional closure’. Classic Anglicanism – for us classic Episcopalianism - expresses the spirituality of discipleship – passionate, human and humble – people on a journey who see themselves as incomplete.

It is a bit of a stretch from there to Boris’ book on Winston Churchill. The reviewers tended to say that it was of course a book not about Churchill but about Boris – written in the wistful hope that as a grateful nation turned to Churchill in its hour of need so in different times it might turn to Boris. Boris too is a student of communication – ‘Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few’ Churchhill uses the punchy language of the Anglo-Saxon roots and, says Boris, so speaks directly into the bloodstream of the English speaking peoples.

So today in her ordination as a Deacon in the church of God Carol enters a new phase of what is already a rich and valuable ministry. She faces the challenge of speaking her faith straight into the bloodstream of the people. And even that may be too much for we then think of words attributed to St Francis, ***‘"****Preach the Gospel at all times. Use words if necessary"?*

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In our worship today, we have transferred the feast of Mary Magdalene. She is remembered as the first person to declare the resurrection. Others were attempting to grasp what had happened. She said simply, ‘I have seen the Lord.’

The ministry to which Carol is ordained today is not primarily a ministry of institution and structure. It is the ministry which we all share – the ministry which stands in the presence of death and proclaims resurrection in the simple words, ‘I have seen the Lord’ It is the primary ministry of the baptised who are baptised into the death of Christ that they may walk with him in the newness of his risen life. Sometimes Carol will do that in the formal setting of a funeral. But more often she will declare resurrection hope every time others speak of death, of loss of hope, of fear, of the inevitability that things can only get worse, of the realism and good sense which close down hope and possibility. She will ;listen politely but the voice in her soul will be saying, ‘I have seen the Lord’

In the All Souls Group, Carol’s will have a particular role She will stand at the bridge point between the traditional congregations in St Columba’s and St Serfs and the new congregation of St Peter’s. Carol will do as she has done throughout her professional life – she will be a translator and interpreter. She will also stand in each place – different as they are – and say convincingly and straight into the bloodstream, ‘I have seen the Lord’ What gets into the bloodstream? Integrity, I think. Certainly the deep and inner joy which is the transforming power of the spirit. A complete absence of fear for love has cast it out. A passion for justice and a compassionate and forgiving love for all people. And a desire to make disciples.

People know – they know instantly – whether that authenticity is present or not.

I think Isaac Walton had it about right when he spoke of ‘*such hymns and anthems as he and the angels now sing in heaven"* for all of this is about the meeting of earth and heaven in our lives

It is particularly so as we with Carol hear that spiritual mountain of a question, ‘Do you believe that you are truly called by God to serve as a Deacon in the Church?’

And when Carol says simply ‘I do’ – our hearts will add, ‘For I have seen the Lord’