

**Sermon delivered by Archdeacon the Venerable Olivia Graham at the occasion of the Collation, Induction and Installation of the Reverend Catherine Vaughan as Vicar at St. George's Church, Owlsmoor.**

**Readings: Deut. 28:1-14 and 1 Cor. 12: 12-31**

So, we are gathered here, eager and expectant, full of curiosity and enthusiasm and hope, to bring Catherine formally into our midst and complete the body of Christ here.

Although I know that you are delighted that the vacancy is at an end, I have to say that I think vacancies are a good thing, because they enable people to flourish in their gifting, experiment gently, find their voice, bear up different parts of the structure, and sometimes even to fly! Catherine is joining you, the people of God here in Owlsmoor, and rejoicing that you have done all these things.

Now, we've heard two wonderful readings this evening.

The first, from Deuteronomy is about blessings, and about how blessings flow from obedience. If you obey the voice of the Lord your God; if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God; if you walk in his ways; if you do not turn aside from any of his words, or go after other gods ....

Then .....

Oh, what blessings will be yours. In the city and in the field. The fruit of your womb, of your ground, of your cattle and flocks, your barns, your land. Your basket and kneading bowl and all the work of your hands and everything undertake. Your coming in and your going out. All shall be blessed, and abundance shall be yours.

What a promise! This reading reminds us of something which is completely foundational to our life. That we must be rooted and grounded in God; our foundation, our source, the spring of living water ever bubbling up and refreshing and renewing us. We do this alone, in our times of prayer and quiet. And we do it in company with others when we meet to worship and praise God as we do tonight, and to pour out our gratitude and our love. We are complete when we are in God. We are fully alive. We are blessed.

The second reading is maybe better known. It is about gifts and why we are given them, and the ways in which we exercise them. And it's about where they come from.

*There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.*

In God we live and move and have our being. And when we are in God, in Christ, in the Spirit, we receive both blessing and gift. How shall we recognise the blessings, and how shall we use the gifts?

I want to go back a bit, and say something more about being in God. You see, when we are baptised, we join the company of God's people, the *laos* in Greek, we are incorporated into it. When we are baptised, we are made clean and fresh; when we are baptised we turn to face Godwards. We are forgiven people, born again people, people who call others to join us on a journey following Christ. That's our identity.

Together, we who are baptised are chosen people, holy people, God's own people, a royal priesthood. We are part of the Body of Christ, and each part has a vital role to play for the wellbeing of the whole.

We who are baptised, we who are part of this company, we who are in God, have each been given gifts. And they are different. There are gifts of intelligence, wisdom, discernment, preaching, farsightedness, healing, prayer, faith. And there are gifts of service, encouragement, compassion, cheerfulness, teaching, leadership, generosity.

*There is a rich variety. But they are all to be used for the common good.*

I'm talking about you.

And into this company of blessed and gifted people, God has called Catherine, his beloved daughter, whom he has both blessed and gifted.

You are relative strangers to each other. You don't yet know fully what Catherine's gifting is, and she is not yet fully aware of yours. You are going to spend a year, I would suggest, getting to know each other, finding out how you fit and complement each other, working at drawing out each other's gifting, finding your roles, exploring your synergy – how you are better together.

It's a little bit like an arranged marriage! You've seen the photos and you've had some brief conversations, and your archdeacons know each other. But now comes the joyful work of seeing how the relationship will grow and develop. You have had a long settled period of ministry here; you've got used to doing things a certain way' you know what you like, and as in all parishes there will be those of you who may quickly say "We tried that before and it didn't work!"

Catherine is from another parish, deanery, diocese. She hasn't shared your history and relationships. She will have ideas and approaches and suggesting which will be new to you, unfamiliar. She will bring change. At times you will experience this as discomforting; at times as immensely exciting.

The people of the Old Testament were nomadic, wandering tribes, who pitched their tents for a while where the water and pasture were abundant, and then moved on. We have lost something of our ability to be nomadic, to be those who journey. But the kingdom of God is not a static kingdom, a fixed place. It is a constantly unfolding story, an evolving scene, a moving picture. And we should never become too comfortable in the place we are, because if the armchairs are too squashy it is hard to get out of them! God is calling, calling. The Holy Spirit is nudging and drawing us on. Christ is walking with us, and he is in us and we are in him.

So my encouragement to you, and my prayer for you, is that together with Catherine, you become ever more fully rooted in God; that you rejoice in the outpouring of his blessing on your lives; that you recognise how God has gifted you and help others to recognise how God has gifted them, and that you allow God to disturb you into a new journey where God can use who you are to increase and multiply the outpouring of his blessings on this community.

Amen.