

Address for the Installation of Morgan Davies as Canons' Verger Sunday 5 February 2023

The Very Revd Dr Sarah Rowland Jones, Dean of St Davids

Amos 2:4-16

Ephesians 4:17-32

I just prayed for Morgan in these words: 'Almighty God stir up in you the gifts of his grace, sustain you in your ministry, and bless you in all you do, so that all may be drawn to the beauty of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Then I asked if he'd share in all this prayer asked. Morgan responded, 'With the help of God, I will.'

Drawing everyone more deeply into the beauty and love and service of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, is what Cathedral life is all about. And it's at the heart of what a verger's life is all about.

In some ways vergers all like quasi-invisible pieces of moving furniture. Especially during services, they are a barely noticeable presence as they steer the rest of us through our paces. Likewise during the rest of the day, their role is to show off the building, all it contains, and all it symbolises, as the place of living faith where countless generations have encountered the living God. They do this, so everyone who comes here in this generation should similarly have maximum capacity to be enabled to hear the call of Jesus to follow him, and be encouraged to take whatever next step he places before them.

Of course, living so that others can see, recognise, and respond to the call of the living God we know best in Jesus Christ it's not merely the task of vergers. This is the vocation of every Christian.

How then should we live? Our Old and New Testament lessons give clear warnings that we are not to become caught up in the worst habits of the wider world, 'corrupt and deluded', which prioritise selfish greed – whether around riches, morality, or pandering to one's own ego, image, or anything else that bolsters our sense of self – regardless of its cost to others.

Saint Paul direct us towards a better way. It's worth noting that he is speaking to the Christian community as a whole rather more than to each of the individuals which make it up. These are instructions to all of us in the life we lead together.

'Clothe yourselves with the new self' Paul writes. We have just vested Morgan with his robe of office. He is newly clothed. But it isn't as if he hasn't worn such a robe before; and nor does it mean that now he's put it on, that he knows everything about what it is to be a verger. He will keep on growing into this life and calling.

Likewise all of us must keep growing into the life and calling which we all share, becoming ever more fully our true selves, 'created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.' Have a look at the passage from Ephesians when you get home,

for more details. But the nub of it is that we're called to be truthful, not letting anger get the better of us, not bearing grudges, and working diligently.

Paul gives a particular warning to the Christian community about how we speak to one another, and how we speak about one another: no evil talk, no juicy gossip, no putting others down, but only talking in ways that encourage us to see the best in one another and to draw out the best in one another. It grieves the Holy Spirit when we indulge in scandal-mongering and rumours, or even just moaning about the shortcomings that we might see in others which can so often narrowly label and diminish them.

That's the way of the world. For us, no bitterness, no wrath no anger no wrangling and slander and certainly no malice or spite. The bottom line is to be kind and to be tender hearted, to forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven us.

It's not easy, especially if we fall into those habits without even being aware of them. but the good news comes with the answer Morgan gave earlier: With the help of God, I will.

'Ask and it will be given' said Jesus. So when we're tempted to be unkind, to be less than our better selves, we should ask for help. We should pray that the small voice of the Spirit will sound a note of alarm in our conscience, shine a warning light, wave a red flag, just as we prepare to open our mouths and say the thing we really ought not. We should ask for the gift of grace to find that full stop and just halt there where we are, and shut up.

Since Paul is writing to the community, let us also ask, and pray, for each other and for all of us together to grow into such habits as reflect what it means for us to be clothed with the new self, the self of Christ. And let us thank God for those among us who are better at this than we are, who oil the wheels of community life, and by whose example we can be encouraged to be our better selves.

The verging team are particularly guilty of this grace! How they fulfil their role contributes especially powerfully to the ways in which this place reflects the presence of Jesus Christ among us. They are the first to step inside each morning, and so they set the scene for the rest of us as we arrive for our own particular tasks. I especially want to thank them for the gracious way they always greet the arriving clergy each morning: a warm compassionate welcome that helps us as we ready ourselves to lead the services and so start each day on the best possible foot, as we offer our worship to the praise and glory of God, and intercede for the Bishop and everyone and everything within this diocese, entrusted to her care.

So bless you Morgan, as you take up this new role, even as we thank God for all you are, and all that you have already brought to our lives.

It is certainly our prayer, for you this evening and in all that lies ahead, and also for ourselves, that Almighty God will stir up in you, and in each of us, and in all of us together, the gifts of his grace; sustaining us in our ministries and blessing us in all we do, so that, most importantly of all, everyone who comes here may be drawn more deeply into the beauty of God, and into God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ our Lord. We ask this in sure and certain confidence that with the help of God it will indeed be so.

Amen