

**The Admission and Licensing of Readers
Leominster
23.9.17 10.30am**

1 Samuel 3: 1-10

Ephesians 4: 1-13

Matthew 7: 21-27

“Here I am, Lord,” said Samuel.

“Here I am, Lord,” say those of you to be licensed this morning.

Perhaps like Samuel you thought it was just someone else with a bright idea that you should become a Reader. All of you will have been called in different ways, but you have discovered that it is God who is calling you to this ministry.

And the step you are taking today is a very significant one – not just for you, but for the churches to which you belong, indeed for the, diocese as a whole.

All Christians are called, as St Paul put it, “to live a life worthy of our calling”; all Christians are called, as our gospel put it, to put their faith into practice like the wise man who built his house on the rock.

But you are called to a distinctive, authorised ministry as Readers – if it’s not distinctive, if your just like everyone else, why on earth have you done all this training?

You are here to help others to build their houses on rock, to help the body of Christ to be built up until, in the words of our epistle, “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

One great advocate of Reader ministry wrote some years ago “Who, having been called to be a preacher, would stoop to be a King? I want the preacher to be seen, not as a puny little essayist commenting on contemporary issues with a dash of religion thrown in, but as an emissary, who, God help them, handles a word which is like fire, purifying, warming, like a hammer that breaks rocks.”

I want to encourage you to take your ministry as Readers very seriously; but not to take yourselves too seriously at all. Let me say briefly three things about your ministry as Readers.

1. Don't let the profundity of the gospel lead you to try to show how clever you are.

We know that in teaching and interpreting the word of God, we're dealing with profound truths, with ideas and stories from many different cultures, often not easy to interpret from one context to ours. And you've been trained in all sorts of theological ideas. But don't let that lead you to try to show how clever you are.

Becoming a Reader is not taking up a hobby; your study of scripture as you prepare to preach is not like researching family history or stamp collecting. You have been given gifts “to equip God's people to build up the body of Christ.”

2. Equally, don't let the simplicity of the gospel become an excuse for being naïve.

The gospel is profound, but it is also simple. God's love, and his forgiveness and the life that he offers through Jesus Christ are at one and the same time profound and simple – but not simplistic or naïve. We're dealing with mystery, with holy things, faith is often not easy, living the Christian life is not easy.

You haven't been licensed to be churchy; you are being licensed to be bearers of the good news of Jesus Christ; as profound and simple as that.

3. Always remember, in the midst of all the effort required in your ministry, that at root it's the grace of God that matters. The great theologian Karl Rahner prayed like this, "oh Lord, grant me the grace to belong to the number of your lowly servants who are amazed when they are received by their fellow human beings. Let my heart tremble again and again in grateful surprise at the miracles of your grace, which is mighty in the midst of weakness."

That's the privilege of preaching, teaching and interpreting the word of God: the privilege but also the responsibility of doing so.

And I hope that you will all be prepared to break new ground in your ministry, as we pray and work for spiritual and numerical growth across the diocese. You are not being licensed just to keep the show on the road. I trust that you will break new ground – how about a songs of praise in a care home; or find a completely secular setting to do something on Remembrance Day or on some other occasion or, a carol service somewhere totally unexpected; take a car load to experience something different; form a book group – there is scope for breaking new ground. Here I am Lord.....

You are being licensed to handle both the profundity and the simplicity of the gospel, to respond to the grace of God, to be prepared to break new ground for the gospel.

God bless you in your ministry.