

Proverbs 3:13-18
2 Corinthians 4:1-6
Matthew 9:9-13
St. Matthew, 21/9/2012

A. Katherine Grieb
Westminster Abbey
Bishop Edward Condry
Consecration for Ramsbury

To the Glory of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Today the Church remembers and gives thanks for Saint Matthew the Evangelist. Our Gospel passage recounts the call of Matthew, the tax collector. He was sitting at the tax booth when Jesus walked by and said to him, "Follow me." He got up and followed him.

It sounds so easy, as if you didn't need to do a thousand things first before you could follow Jesus in a new way in a new place. Ed, you and Sarah have had to move your household, such a place of warm hospitality, with its chickens, dog, guinea pigs and others of God's creatures. You have had to do what Roy Oswald calls "running through the thistles," saying thank you and farewell to the many people who have loved you and loved working with you during your ministries at Canterbury. Of course, you are also being welcomed and greeted by new friends and companions and you are probably already beginning to see new opportunities for ministry and for collaboration in Ramsbury and in the larger context of Salisbury.

So many changes of so many kinds. You'll be changing your computer password, from something like Cantuar597 to something like Ramsbury909, the year the two bishoprics of Wiltshire and Berkshire were taken from the bishopric of Winchester to form the new see of Ramsbury. There are gains and losses: you lose "the holy blessed martyr...that them hath holpen when that they were seke" but you gain a ghost, I understand, "wild William Darrell" at the 13th century parish of Holy Cross, and the Ramsbury bulldogs, the Magna Carta, and the Sarum rite, a liturgical tradition so powerful that Archbishop Cranmer mentioned it first in his preface to the 1549 Book of Common Prayer.

These few examples, some of them lighthearted, are beside the point, because, mostly, you will lose and gain what Saint Matthew lost and gained: you lose the security of what you have known in your past life and you gain the glorious adventure of following Jesus into a new life which you hardly understand at the moment, even if, like Ed, you have taught courses for new bishops in the Anglican Communion over the last several years. You, with Sarah, are about to learn what it means to be a bishop on a whole new level.

Saint Matthew can be helpful here: there is one point in his Gospel where scholars think we may catch a glimpse of the man himself, a point where we seem to hear his own voice describing his vocation as a scribe and an evangelist. It comes in chapter thirteen, towards the end of the chapter. Matthew has just described Jesus telling parables of the kingdom of heaven: it's like finding a treasure hidden in a field, it's like finding a pearl of tremendous value and beauty. Jesus asks his disciples, "Have you understood all this?" and when they respond "yes," he says, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasury what is new and what is old."

It is quite possible that Matthew thought of himself as a scribe who had been trained for the kingdom of heaven, or perhaps the head of a school of scribes, possibly in Antioch, who were being trained for the kingdom of heaven. Matthew may have sensed the Lord's blessing on his own work of writing a Gospel, bringing together, like the master of a household, what is old (in Matthew's case, the Holy Scriptures of Israel) and what is new (in Matthew's case, the Gospel of Mark, probably written shortly before his own).

That's very much like the work of a bishop, especially a bishop in the Church of England where you have such glorious language in Canon C 15, Of the Declaration of Assent. In the Preface to the Declaration of Assent, it is said that the Church of England "professes the faith which is uniquely revealed in the Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in every generation."

There it is, isn't it, the ancient faith, revealed in the Scriptures and set forth in the creeds which is to be proclaimed in new and fresh ways; what is old and what is new both being treasured; and the bishop, the head of the household, is, like the evangelist Matthew, and, indeed, all of us, being trained for the kingdom of heaven in the process of following our Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps to update the metaphor for a bishop who is both athletically inclined and keen on the idea of pilgrimage, the bishop is the one who, having planned ahead, brings out of his rucksack what is needed, both the old and the new, for the next part of the journey forward.

You've got many treasures in that rucksack of yours, a deep knowledge of the Christian tradition, a strong commitment to studying and proclaiming the Word of God, a quiet presence at the Lord's Table, impatience with dishonesty and easy answers, a strong commitment to justice for the economically disadvantaged, a love of history and the courage to read it self-critically, and a wicked dry sense of humor, among other things. You're well-positioned to interpret both the old and the new in our Christian treasury, the faith revealed in the Scriptures and creeds to be proclaimed afresh in every generation.

Knowing your love of all things historical, Ed, I've done a bit of research on some of your predecessors who were bishops of Ramsbury, or at least the names of some of those ancient Anglo-Saxon bishops, like Aethelston, Oswulf, Bertwald, Wulfgar, and Oda the Severe and Sigeric the Serious. So I got to thinking about epithets that might be said of you. Of course you don't get to choose your own epithet: others decide if you are "the severe" or "the serious" or whatever and usually it's long after you're dead. Now you're in great shape, having just cycled from Olympia, Greece to the Olympics here, but I thought we might still have a go at it. I'm afraid the folks here will insist that Edward the Confessor is already taken, and anyway, it should start with E, so I tried out a number of E's, Edward the Earnest, since we all know "the importance of being Earnest". I ruled out eccentric and extravagant, but there's still Edward the eloquent, extraordinary, excellent, exemplary, exuberant, enthusiastic, energetic, and then probably Edward the exhausted. Finally, I settled on three of them to charge you with:

I hope you will be known as Edward the Explorer. There are adventures you and Sarah cannot begin to imagine ahead of you, as you work with Bishop Holtam and with Bishop Kings and the wonderful people of the Diocese of Salisbury. I know that you will continue to be well-informed and well-read and I hope you'll take some of those fresh understandings of what it means to be Church and try them out with your people. I'm sure you will remember that the seven last words of the Church are, "But we've never done it that way."

I hope you will be known as Edward the Encourager. You already have that reputation among many of us who know you from your Canterbury years and I trust that your staff, your co-workers, your fellow bishops, your people, and everyone you meet will be blessed by your firm and gentle leadership style. I hope that, like Jesus, you will be found in the company of tax collectors and sinners, those who are sick and have need of a physician, and also those who are sick of hearing "the Gospel" from a church that doesn't seem to care much about them.

Finally, I hope you will be known as Edward the Evangelist. I hope you will be a church planter like Saint Paul and tell the story of Jesus Christ with persuasive power like Saint Matthew. For, as Paul says, "We refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God."... "We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake".

As a bishop, I'm certain that you will be called many things, but the most important thing to know is that you have been called by Jesus Christ, just as Saint Matthew was, to follow him. And, because you and Sarah have in fact risen and followed him on this new adventure, we are here today, ready to celebrate with you as you are consecrated a bishop and installed and put to work in the truly fortunate see of Ramsbury in the Diocese of Salisbury.