

Being ordinary

At the end of May as part of the Archbishop of Canterbury's visit to the Diocese, there was the opportunity to join with church congregations from across Gloucester city to walk and pray together. I had the privilege of hosting one of the stops on the walk as we gathered by the Robert Raikes statue in Gloucester Park to particularly pray for the children and young people of our city. As we prayed, we had little pots of salt to sprinkle as a sign of our desire to be like salt in the world (Luke 14.34-35). I was very struck by how the salt could be seen clearly when gathered in the pot, but as we sprinkled it, the grains became invisible in the grass. I think we can sometimes feel overwhelmed by living out our Christian faith with all the other things that press in on us. But as we prayed and I looked up at the statue of Robert Raikes, I was reminded that he was an ordinary man who saw the need for those who had no access to education, due to living in slums, to have that opportunity. He paid for much of the cost of establishing the Sunday schools in Gloucester, and through the paper he owned was able to publicise what was happening. The movement took off and changed the lives of millions of people giving them foundational teaching in the Christian faith, and paving the way for the schooling system we now have in this country. An ordinary man who committed his money and actions to following God, and I think we see the power of God working through that.

As the salt got scattered, I was thinking about us as a church, and the different – often seemingly unseen ways – that our lives change the world around us. The choices that we make each day to live out our Christian faith, to hope, invest, work and pray for a world that reflects God's kingdom. All of these will be making a difference because of the way God holds them and works through them. Currently we are seeing salt being scattered out of St Catharine's as we say goodbye to some people, including Luke, Vicky, Phoebe and Thomas. I personally am really going to miss working alongside Luke and having them as a family as part of St Catharine's, and so we pray for God's blessing on them as they move and settle in Cirencester, trusting that God will continue to work through them there. We also continue to welcome new members of St Catharine's, thinking of the special joy of 3 weeks of baptisms, and getting ready to welcome Clare Negreira in a new way as she is ordained on 30th June, and becomes curate at St Catharine's. We are also praying for a new Youth and Children's worker, and for more people to be involved in this vital ministry in St Catharine's and across the church in Gloucester. Hopefully changing the lives of young people just as Robert Raikes did.

This season of church life is known as 'ordinary time' and it is a reminder that we are all ordinary people living ordinary lives that become extra-ordinary as those lives are caught up in the life and work of God in the world. It is a season of remembering that Jesus is our Lord, and as living connections with Jesus, filled with the Spirit, we have a part to play together in enabling his kingdom to come. We will be focussing on this through our sermons in June and July. And as part of this, our Church Away Day in Newent on Saturday 15th June is a time to strengthen our connections with one another. It will be a brilliant day together including worship, prayer, Bible reflection along with fellowship, food and fun. Last minute bookings can be made through Su-in-the-office. Do try and come even if it is for part of the day.

It is not a bad thing to know that we are ordinary people. It means knowing we each have our limitations, and each have unique gifts to offer. In the ordination service everyone is reminded that we cannot follow God's calling in our own strength and so to pray earnestly for the help of the Holy Spirit. Let us continue to do this as a church and to expect God to do extraordinary things through us as a result.

Every blessing Jo