

I'm not an early riser – more a night owl, really – and my prayer and study time often comes late in the morning. On those few occasions when I have early morning appointments my quiet time may be reduced to saying the Lord's Prayer in my car on the way. On such days, I usually go onto You Tube later on and share in Morning Prayer – even though it may by then be ten at night - with one of the ministers at Wesley's Chapel. I've become quite a fan of You Tube. Godalming United Church has an account, and I occasionally call into their previous Sunday's morning worship (but not when I've been the preacher – I'm easily embarrassed). Last week I discovered that the Methodist Conference can be found on You Tube too – the pastoral addresses of the new President and Vice President, the worship, and all the debates. Perhaps the most moving part for me this year was to watch the Ordination Service at which our own Sydney Samuel Lake received the laying-on of hands.

It took me back to my own ordination in Leicester in 1989, and the commitment I made then which I have renewed every year since. Following the ordination, the President makes a declaration. It is essentially the same today as it was in 1989, though the wording has altered slightly:

Remember your call.

Declare the Good News.

Celebrate the Sacraments.

Serve the needy.

Minister to the sick.

Welcome the stranger.

Seek the lost.

On Sunday I preached on the lectionary Gospel passage, in which Jesus sent out 70 (or it may have been 72) disciples: they had three tasks. The first was to bring peace to ordinary people in their towns and villages and in their homes. Secondly, it was to heal the sick. Thirdly, it was to give them the good news that the Kingdom of God had come near in the person of Jesus. I have the impression that these disciples were not being set aside as Sydney Samuel has been set aside, as I was, for specific ministry. It seems to me that Jesus was calling ordinary people to extraordinary work. Look again at the list above: the call of a presbyter. Compare it with the call of a deacon:

Support the weak.

Bind up the broken.

Gather in the outcast.

Welcome the stranger.

Seek the lost.

The only thing that only a presbyter can do is to celebrate the sacraments, and even then a lay person may be given special dispensation to do so in certain circumstances. A presbyter may preach, but that authority was already given to both Sydney Samuel and myself when we became Local Preachers. All the rest describes the calling we share with every follower of Jesus Christ.

Serve the needy/support the weak.
Minister to the sick/bind up the broken.
Welcome the stranger/gather in the outcast.
Seek the lost.

Charles Wesley, as so often, puts it so beautifully:

I would the precious time redeem,
And longer live for this alone:
To spend and to be spent for them
Who have not yet my Saviour known;
Fully on these my mission prove,
And only breathe, to breathe Thy love.

Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
With boundless charity divine,
So shall I all my strength exert,
And love them with a zeal like Thine,
And lead them to Thy open side,
The sheep for whom their Shepherd died.

God bless,

Peter