**Sermon for Ordination of Deacons**

**Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin**

**Sunday September 17 2023**

**The Revd Nigel Waugh**

‘“I wish I had a stone for the knife,” the old man said after he had checked the lashing on the oar butt. “I should have brought a stone.” You should have brought many things, he thought. But you did not bring them, old man. Now is no time to think of what you do not have. Think of what you can do with what there is.”’

*―****Ernest Hemingway,***[***The Old Man and the Sea***](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/69741)

Matthew and Caroline, that may seem a strange place to start on the day of your ordination in the few minutes we have together this afternoon but I would suggest that there is a certain similarity between the quest of Santiago for the great fish that he had caught on his line and the quest upon which you are about to embark.

You may perhaps remember that Santiago, the old man in the story, was a fisherman who set out in his small boat hoping to catch a fish and he hooked a great Marlin, a fish of a huge size, which almost cost him his life. He battled with it for three days, in hunger and in thirst, in weakness and in lack of sleep, to try to land this fish. And he realized that he was ill equipped. There were many things that he should have brought, including a stone to sharpen his knife.

Is there any job quite as varied as the one to which you are now called?

To celebrate with those who celebrate and to cry with those who cry, often in the same day.

To manage, to lead, to be an expert in the education act of 2011, the safeguarding trust regulations, to be comfortable with children yet not too familiar, patient with the elderly, to be friendly yet confidential with other’s issues and concerns, familiar with drains and rooves, a good driver, timekeeper, be available yet have time for family, in a job with no clocking off time, or overtime, or even a decent job description. Not to mention the awesome tasks of celebrating the holy mysteries and expounding scripture.

You need talents and skills, many of which you probably feel you do not yet have.

“I should have brought a stone for the knife. You should have brought many things that you did not bring.”

Archbishop asked me to preach today. My first thought was ‘why me, who am I, at the latter part of a ministry, to speak to those just beginning and setting out?’

It is hard to know the mind of an archbishop.

Yet perhaps it is fitting to ask someone who has stayed the course.

Ordained in 1979 and am still working in full time ministry.

4 dioceses, north and south

When some 50 years ago, I offered myself for selection, I expected that I might get a phone call saying that I was not suitable, did not have the necessary skills and talents.

I knew that I did not have the necessary skills and talents.

I am still expecting that phone call.

When we are called or feel that we are called, our first reaction is often “why me”? There are surely better people than me?

Moses, whose reaction to his calling, was fivefold. The five marks of being called perhaps? Or 5 excuses:

Who am I? Who are you? They won't believe me. I am not a good speaker. Here am I Lord, … please send someone else.

That seems to be pretty usual. The prophets of the Old Testament – Hosea, Amos, Isaiah - Jeremiah who filled chapters with loud protestations of how dreadful it was to be called to be a prophet of God.

In a reading we had on a recent Sunday Jeremiah questioned the entire basis of his vocation.

“You asked me to speak to the people. I spoke. Look where it has got me. Can I believe you or not?” His message, seen as gloomy by many, was resulting in pain, loneliness and threats.

Sacrificial leadership is not easy.

Martin Luther King junior once said:

“If a man happens to be 36 years old, as I happen to be, and some great truth stands before the door of his life, some great opportunity to stand up for that which is right and that which is just, and he refuses to stand up because he wants to live a little longer and he is afraid his home will get bombed, or he is afraid that he will get shot, he may go on and live until he's 80, and the cessation of breathing in his life is merely the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit. Man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right. A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true”.

MLK spoke of a defining moment in someone’s life, a defining moment such as the moment that Matthew and Caroline are experiencing today.

Martin Luther King junior is an extreme example because we know what happened to him and how things worked out. He was a prophet both in the sense of speaking out the truth to his people of his time and also in the sense of being able to clearly discern what the future was likely to hold.

Your calling to serve the Church of God in this place is, I hope, unlikely to result in being shot or being bombed but you never know.

When I went, more than 40 years ago, to be curate in Ballymena in County Antrim, the first week that I arrived in the town, when my feet had barely touched the ground, there was a massive bomb in the centre of Ballymena and much of the Street, houses and shops were reduced to rubble. I suppose about half a mile from where I was then living. I do remember thinking, what on earth have I let myself in for?

You never know where you might be placed or how things will work out.

To be called by God is a strange idea. Not many people have an audible call. Some have a strong idea and speak with confidence that God has called them to this or that. Others have a much more Hesitant sense of what is happening.

I'm always a little bit wary of those who are very certain of God's calling. People who are very certain are also certain that they are very right, right about many things and many of their own opinions.

I have always taken great comfort in the fact that the service of ordination does not demand that we have heard the call of God but rather that we believe in our heart that God has called us. The answer is not, God has called me but rather ‘I believe God has called me’.

And in the various questions that you will be asked, the answer is ‘by the help of God I will’.

The answer to the questions on whether you will be faithful, diligent in prayer, reading holy scripture, expand the scriptures and teach doctrine is not ‘I will’ but rather ‘by the help of God I will’.

And the Bishop says ‘because none of us can bear the weight of this ministry in our own strength but only by the grace and power of God, let us pray earnestly for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on these persons. Let us also pray that God will each day enlarge and enlighten their understanding of the scriptures so that they may grow stronger and more mature in their ministry as they fashion their lives and the lives of the people they serve on the word of God. There is a development there. And that is good. You do not know it all. You may never know it all. But your understanding of God and of God's will may by the help of God, grow over the years and you will end up in a different place than that from which you began.

Santiago, in his little boat, reflected on all the things he did not have. But he realised he had his experience and his resolution and his tricks.

The two people who come to be ordained today come with a wealth of experience and resolution and tricks.

Caroline, as a barrister, you have spent your career advocating for justice, upholding the rights of the oppressed, and seeking truth.

Matthew, as a psychologist, you have provided healing and guidance to those in emotional distress, nurturing the well-being of countless souls. Both of you have already embodied the spirit of service and compassion that is at the heart of the diaconate.

This is rich experience indeed and it will be invaluable in all the encounters, both difficult and mundane, that you will make in parish life.

The resolution that you have shown, not just in your professional lives, but also in the lengthy process that the church asks you to go through - the process of discernment - marks you out as resolute indeed.

And the tricks that you have learnt, perhaps tricks is a funny word but it is a simple and accurate word will be invaluable to you in the years ahead.

We know what Santiago meant by tricks - all the stratagems, all the experience, all the ways of dealing with problems and eventualities, plumbing their own experience and applying it to new difficulties. These things are invaluable. The church is fortunate that people of such quality, if I may put it like that, have heard the call of God and believe that they are called to serve within our church.

Today, Caroline and Matthew, you are taking a profound step towards following in the footsteps of Christ, becoming servants of God's people in a new way.

As deacons, your role is one of humble service, ministering to the needs of the Church and the wider community. You will be called to wash the feet of others, not with water alone, but with love, compassion, and empathy.

Caroline and Matthew, your legal and psychological expertise will be invaluable in guiding and supporting those who seek spiritual counsel. Your ability to listen, empathize, and offer solace will bring comfort to the troubled souls you encounter in your ministry.

So today is the culmination of many things and it is, I am sure, a daunting one for both Caroline and for Matthew. And perhaps it should be daunting because it is not a task to be taken on lightly. But with as the ordinal says, the grace and power of God and the prayers and support of the people present here today, and their experience and resolution and tricks, we trust it is a calling that will bear much fruit.

Caroline and Matthew, may you serve with humility, love, and joy, bringing your unique gifts to the service of God's people. As you embark on this new chapter in your spiritual journey, may you find strength and inspiration

May your ministry as deacons be a beacon of God's love and grace in a world that so desperately needs it.

“Now is not the time to think of what you do not have. Think of what you can do with what there is.”

May God richly bless you both in all the years that lie ahead. Amen