

St Mary's, Carden Place  
Revd Terry Taggart – Institution

27 September 2018  
Bishop Anne Dyer

### Finding a valued place

I hear there has been some serious tidying up going on, that there has been a clear out in this church. Some items that were deemed 'maybe of use someday', and had then become 'rubbish that someone needs to deal with' have finally made their way out of St Mary's, before the new rector got an opportunity to look in all the cupboards, and ask the question 'what on earth are you doing with all this?'

And as it has been here, I expect it has also been for Terry and Sam as they have moved house. There will have been some things that no longer served a useful purpose, and they will have made their way to charity shops or recycling centres.

In our homes, and in our churches, what was yesterday's essential item is today's rubbish. Life, and our times and needs, moves on.

This is also true in a city when it comes to buildings. A place that was once at the heart of things loses its importance and purpose. So it is either removed, or re-purposed. Such has been the fate of many of the churches in the city, buildings we might pass every day. Once places of worship, valued and loved, now they are restaurants and casinos, offices and apartments. It is easy for a church, and its congregation to pass away.

This is, of course, to think functionally about things, where value is found in purpose. As it is with material things, so it can be with people. In any society it is easy for some to be deemed of lower value, especially if value is rooted in purpose and functionality. This one or that one does not contribute very much, so they do not matter as much as those who put in more – through industry, taxes, and usefulness.

The readings set for today tell us a different story. St Paul writes to a church whose membership spans social classes. Into this context, where some are very wealthy and think of themselves as well educated, and some are from these things, he comes with a reminder.

**‘God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.’**

He goes on to say that God chooses **‘what is weak to shame the wise, and what is low and despised, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are.’**

It is as if God is saying: don’t throw that away – I can use it.

This tells us that God values things differently to the way that we do, sees people in a different way. So when it comes to church buildings, and congregations, and people generally – we have to think differently than the times that we are in if we are to think like God.

This is the task before Terry as he takes up the post of Rector here. Now Terry is a practical man, he is organised and gets things done. It is good that you have sorted through some of your cupboards, because he now won’t need to do that, he can focus on other things.

Terry is so much more than a grounded, ex-policeman. Terry is a priest, and what he will do here, from his place of prayer in the middle of this congregation, is help you think again about what matters, what you should be doing, and why.

Terry is very much a people-person. It is people – the congregation, this neighbourhood, those that he meets as he travels, about who will come first. Terry will pray for you, visit you (he loves visiting, isn’t that good news!!!), he will fret over you, and wonder what to do with you and among you. His natural inclination will be to include everyone – more and more trying to make his ‘everyone’ the same as God’s ‘everyone’, which as we heard from our gospel reading always includes the most marginal, unfortunate and unwise people in this world. If this congregation is not reaching out, coming to understand itself outside of these walls, as much as it does when it is gathered here, then Terry will know that there is work to be done. So Terry will help you find and deepen your ministries of service to those in need in and around this city.

You, the congregation here at St Mary’s, have worked very hard to keep things going through the vacancy. Your inclination might now be to say ‘phew – a Rector at last’, and leave it to Terry to provide you with the worship that you need to inspire your spiritual life.

And resting for a little while, especially those who have done the most, is appropriate. But belonging to church is not just about the beauty of worship as we gather, but rather being changed by our encounters with this same beauty of God so that we carry some of this, each of us, out into our daily lives.

When a congregation begins to age, when it becomes smaller than it once was, when resources (both money and free time) reduce, then it is so easy to come to believe that Church life is about maintaining Sunday services. But worship is what we come to from our lives of service, and worship is that which inspires and enthuses us to return to serve once again. Worship and service, loving God and loving our neighbour, always belong together.

You, the congregation here, are ready to discover afresh what it is that you are for, your purpose, and to find out that God has no intention of binning or recycling you. Terry is ready to lead you in this exploration.

And then we come to this building, so beautiful and cared for, with such a significant history in the life of this diocese and our denomination. Terry will work with you to help you identify ways in which, for example, the wonderful acoustic in this building, and your love of hospitality, and your desire to have more people visit this place, come together. How might you use this great gift for the glory of God?

For Terry this is a new place, for you already here, what is before you is new or renewed purpose. Through this our prayer is that together you might make as a priority others who, for many and various reasons, find themselves among those to whom little value is accorded, who think of themselves as worthless, or foolish – because there you will find God at work. There you will be reminded that God does not discard or throw away a single person... all find purpose and significance when God is present.

So we pray for you as you begin to find renewed purpose together, reminded of a verse from our first reading:

**‘Your godliness will lead you forward,**

**And the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind.’**