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Bishop Michael’s farewell to Bishop Ruth

There is a story told of three celtic saints arriving at the court of King Alfred in this, the former Kingdom of Wessex. The saints had drifted here across the sea from Ireland in their coracle – a boat made of hides and laths, with few provisions and without oars. When asked to explain their arrival the saints said this ‘We stole away because we wanted for the love of God to be on pilgrimage, we cared not where.’

Ruth and Howard, we are so glad that for a time, your coracle has landed here in this part of the former Kingdom of Wessex, our Diocese of Bath and Wells. You have carried to us the love of God, experienced in the love you have shown for the people of this place, in your passion for God’s justice and mercy, in your kindness and in all that you have given to so many during your time here.

I thought about those three celtic saints because it’s been clear in the last two years that you have been exemplifying for us what it means to have a trust in God that leads to pilgrimage, to journeying with him. Ruth, it wasn’t in a coracle that you made your way to Coventry, but in modern day terms you weren’t carried there by much more security or care for your own interests than that offered by hides and laths to those celtic sailors. You heeded God’s call to serve the people of that place and we’re so proud that putting your trust in God, off you went.

We looked forward very much to your return. It’s not strictly a saying of the celtic saints, but when we think about you the phrase ‘If you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans’ does seem to come to mind.

For now, you are answering that wild, persistent, compelling, trust demanding call of God once again. With first mate Howard you are again about to step into your coracle and make your way to Liverpool. You don’t steal away. You go with our love. For we know that what calls you and summons you on to the next stage of your journey and adventures is the love of God which beckons you on to pilgrimage. Once again, your care is not for yourself, but for the people and communities that you will serve.

So we wish you Godspeed. You go with our love and our gratitude to all that lies before you. As you leave us, we sent you out into the waters with this blessing:

Christ be with you,

Christ within you,

Christ behind you,

Christ before you,

Christ beside you,

Christ to win you,

Christ to comfort and restore you,

Christ beneath you,

Christ above you,

Christ in quiet,

Christ in danger,

Christ in hearts of all that love you,

Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

We bind unto yourselves today,

The strong name of the Trinity:

By invocation of the same,

The Three in One and One in Three,

Of Whom all nature hath creation,

Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:

Praise to the Lord of our salvation –

Salvation is of Christ the Lord!