## Put on Christ Rom 13:11-14 and John 13:1-17

### Wells Cathedral, Sunday 29th June 2025 (Ordination)

Sir David McNee was Commissioner of the Metropolitan London Police in the 1970s and 1980s. He is credited with the following anecdote about the London Metropolitan Police exams, noted for their complexity. Someone wrote this supposed exam question:

*You are on patrol in an outer London borough when an explosion occurs in a gas main in a nearby street. On investigation, you find a large hole blown in the road and there is an overturned van beside the crater.*

*Inside the van there is a strong smell of alcohol. Both occupants, a man and a woman, are injured. You recognize the man in the driver’s seat as a disqualified driver, and the woman as the wife of your inspector, currently away at the Police College.*

*A passing motorist stops to offer assistance and you recognize him from a police notice as wanted for armed robbery.*

*Suddenly, a man runs out of a nearby house shouting that his wife is expecting a baby and that the shock of the explosion has brought the birth imminent.*

*At that moment, you hear a man crying for help, having been blown into an adjacent canal by the explosion. He cannot swim. …*

*Bearing in mind the fact that you are to appear the following morning on a disciplinary charge initiated by your Inspector, in addition to the provisions of the Mental Health Act, describe in a few words what action you would take.*

It is then alleged that one bright young officer picked up their pen and wrote, 'Remove uniform and mingle with crowd'.

### Mingle with the crowd

The story is an old one and I tell it without embarrassment because it reminds us of the temptation that faces all who are called to public office or to public ministry: the temptation to ‘remove uniform and mingle with the crowd’.

Those being ordained deacon today are being called to public ministry as deacon in the Church of God.

I know that you feel the weight of that office, having spent time with you over the retreat: you will be tempted to ‘remove uniform and mingle with the crowd’.

The good news is that you are not alone: every Christian is called to step out of the crowd, to deny ourselves and to pick up our cross, and to follow Jesus. We all face the temptation to go with the flow, to ’remove uniform and mingle with the crowd’.

### Be Christian

How then will you persevere? Here is more good news. We persevere, you persevere, in the same way that you began the Christian life: by putting on Christ. We see this from the New Testament reading from Paul’s letter to the Romans.

## Put on Christ (Romans 13:11-14) (p 11)

Romans is a letter written by the apostle Paul to a church that he had not yet met. At this point of the letter he is encouraging them to keep going in the Christian life.

The last line of this passage is critical: without that line, the passage reads like good advice to drop bad habits and adopt good habits: to ‘put on your best self’.

There is nothing wrong with dropping bad behaviour and adopting good behaviour. It is a good thing to do. But it is not the essence of Christianity.

To be a Christian is to clothe yourself with Christ. *It is the language of putting on a jacket, rather like the green jacket that Rory McIlroy put on when he became Golf Masters Champion.*

To continue as a Christian is also to clothe yourself with Christ.

Why clothed with Christ? We have ordinary clothing to wear, so why clothed with Christ? This passage speaks not of material clothing but spiritual clothing. Spiritually speaking, our clothing is but rags and threads before God. We are like Adam and even if the Garden after the first sin: they realised they were naked, they were ashamed and hid.

* we can try to clothe ourselves with other things, but they cannot cover us. Not even putting on our best self with cover us.
* Christ is beautiful, holy, complete, acceptable, beloved: to be clothed in him is to be freed from nakedness and shame and guild; freed for relationship with God and service in his name.

To be clothed with Christ is to accept a gift. This cannot be earned: indeed it must not be earned. It is a gift, in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “a free gift costing nothing less than everything.”

You cannot endure: but he can

You cannot resist the temptation to ‘remove uniform and mingle with the crowd’: but he can.

So put on Christ.

We will be reminded of this in a few minutes, when the Bishop says (p 18)

… You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God. …

### The Genuine Article

How do you know that you have clothed yourself with the genuine article, with the real Christ?

It is notable that both Jesus and the OT prophets spoke at length and with strong warnings to religious people to call out their hypocrisy and false religion. They thought they were doing the right thing but they were mistaken.

Look around you: we are in the cathedral of a Diocese in the Church of England; we are dressed to the nines. Friends, we are the religious people! How will we know that when we put on Christ, we have put on the genuine article and not a cheap imitation?

*Let’s say that I decided to buy my wife a designer handbag. (She would be as surprised as I am). How do I know that what I buy is the real thing, and not a fake from the local market?*

For a handbag I expect the answer is to look at the workmanship and to look for the handbag equivalent of a hall mark.

I’m not interested in handbags but I am interested in putting on the real Christ. What is the workmanship and where is the hallmark of the genuine article, the true Jesus Christ? We find this in our Gospel reading (p 14), from John’s Gospel, which teaches us that when we put on Christ (the true Christ) we put on Service.

## Put on Service (John 13:1-17)

### Clothing and Character

The second reading takes us to the upper room on the night of the Last Supper. The other three gospels focus on the meal itself and on the institution of the Lord’s Supper or Eucharist. John’s Gospel teaches the same truth about Jesus’ death for our sins but in a different way: Jesus’ act of service in washing his disciples’ feet teaches us about his act of salvation on the cross. It is not less than an act of service: but it is more than that.

Because we wear shoes, none of us are in the habit of washing one another’s feet. It was dirty and slightly degrading: *perhaps like cleaning another person’s toilet* - it’s not for friends to do if we can make a stranger and a servant do it. I think this explains Peter’s initial resistance to be served by Jesus, in verse 8 (middle of the page): ‘You will never wash my feet.’

This meal isn’t really about mud or feet at all. It is about being able to stand before God without shame:

Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ 9 Simon Peter said to him, ‘Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!’

If I may mix metaphors, Peter’s **feet** are washed with Jesus’ water and the towel around his waist: Peter’s **heart** is washed by Jesus blood shed on the cross. Jesus came to make Peter clean in *that* way. Jesus came to make you clean in *that* way. Jesus came to serve and not to be served. Matthew and Mark record Jesus as saying this

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’ (Mark 10:45 NRSV)

Jesus is among them and us as one who serves. The character of Christ is one of service.

Here then is the mark of the genuine Christ: service. If you put on the real Christ, you will put on service because the character of Jesus Christ is to serve. Service is the hallmark.

The opposite then is also true: if you think that you have put on Christ but there is no service, and instead you find that you have put on self, or status, or enslaving others, then let your alarm bells ring. The hallmark of Christ is service.

Put on Christ: put on service. Notice also the last line of that reading: ‘you are blessed if you do [these things]’.

What does it look like in practice?

## Conclusion and Applications

**Deacons**: the first part of keeping going as a deacon is to keep going as a Christian. Therefore put on Christ:

- Make him the focus of your devotional life and your worship;

- Ask him for the strength you will need each new day.

=> If I may say a word to the receiving incumbents and the receiving churches: thank you for your desire and your willingness to receive this deacon and to nurture them in their ministry. Please will you be sure to nurture them first of all in their own Christian walk because it is through putting on Christ that they will grow and persevere in putting on service among you.

**Deacons**, you have a ministry to the world and a ministry to the church.

=> Your ministry to the world is to show through your service what Christ looks like. “Why have you put on service?” Because I have put on Christ. “Who is he that he should inspire such service?” I’m glad you asked: come and see; come and ask.

=> You also have a ministry to the church and more specifically to the clergy. One of the features of ordination in the Church of England (as I understand it) is that subsequent ordinations (as Priest and consecration as Bishop) do not replace earlier ones but build on them. They stack up rather than swap out.

* Everyone ordained deacon is a deacon.
* Everyone ordained deacon and then ordained priest (or presbyter) is still a deacon.
* Everyone ordained deacon and priest and the consecrated Bishop is still a deacon.

Your ministry of service must remind and inspire all of us to keep service as the base layer and bedrock of our ministry, whether we are called to the role of Bishop, priest or deacon.

=> Looking beyond the deacons, for **all Christians,** put on Christ and put on service. Christian living is at times complex and challenging. I find it immensely reassuring that the heartbeat of keeping going in ministry is the same as the heartbeat of keeping going in Christ: it is to put on Christ.

And if you would not yet call yourself a Christian - then look at those who put on Christ and who put on service and you may be looking at the genuine article. Watch them carefully.

The words of this closing prayer were written by the late Bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith can come from his collection *Someone who Beckons* (IVP, 1978) It is called ‘On behalf of Christ’ and seems an appropriate way to lead on:

## 49 On behalf of Christ (2 Cor 5:17-20; 6:3-10) [p 113]

I tremble, God:

and it's enough to make anyone tremble—

let alone a minister of Christ's gospel.

…

Lord, who is sufficient for these things? Alas, not I!

How many of us, Lord, are children of our time

in the work of the ministry, not firmly rooted

in the timeless heart of our calling?

But when you call, you equip:

and so I pray for all Christian workers,

missionaries, ministers, pastors,

teachers, shepherds,

and especially for these my friends, by name:

*[John, Rosanna, Kevin, Carmen, Michael, Linsday, Rachel, Susannah, Anne,. Caryl, David, Lorna]*

Keep clear in all of us the vision of

your priorities.

Give  us the humility that belongs to servants,

and the authority

that belongs to servants of a great Master.

Give us high ideals, and the

Spirit's strength to reach them, and to raise them,

even in our middle age!

For the sake of Jesus, your Son, our Lord

who calls us to his service.

Amen.

**Silence is kept.**