







We need each other in this world to help us find God.

If people are going to learn that their own stories resonate with Christ's story they need a place to come and hear that story.

If people are going to recognise the glory of God even in the greyest routines of life, they need a place where they can come to focus on God and learn the signs of his presence.

If people are going to find the hope and the salvation they crave, they need a faith community to proclaim and to demonstrate the saving power of God to them.

If people are going to experience the miracles of re-birth and renewal, they are going to need a lot of strong and loving arms to lift them up from destruction and despair.

And if people are going to catch God's vision of a fair and just world, they are going to need a strong and passionate community to be seen working for that vision.

That is what the church is here for and through all our long history, as we have grappled with our success and our failure, our faithfulness and our betrayals, our wisdom and our crass stupidity, liberals versus evangelicals, Isaac Watts versus Graham Kendrick, we have been dragged back over and over again to the basic reason for our existence. We are here to make sense of God to the world and to make sense of the world for God. That is what true priesthood is all about.

There is a priesthood of all believers because each of you have stories to tell, experiences to affirm, faith to share, a vision to build, love to offer. Everybody has their part to play in creating this space in which men, women and children can be given a voice, a vocabulary and a community in which to make sense of life and sense of God. Despite all the failings of organised religion, you cannot grow in faith on your own. We are all called, like Melchizedek, to be "priests of the most High God" in some shape or form and, trust me, you all have some of that in you.

And professional, ordained ministry? Is it essential or even useful to the church and world? That is not a question I am required to answer. I can only say that I knew myself called by God to make Christian ministry my life's work and despite all that have got wrong or felt doubtful about I have never quite been able to convince myself that that call did not happen. There is an old saying that *there is nothing certain in life but death and taxes*. There is nothing certain in my life except death, taxes and my call to ministry. But even so, without the church, that call could never have been fulfilled. You affirmed that call and you helped to make that ministry happen.

So- if a book were to be written about my friends and me and what we did with our lives, how would that finish up?

Heather became a Probation Officer and Ruth became a journalist; Tony went into the retail trade and Gary became an Officer in the RAF; Chris became a librarian and Anne became a Local Councillor. And what about Jennifer? Is the status of her profession at the top of the list or at the bottom? Neither. Jennifer just did the only thing she could possibly have done in becoming a Minister and that is all there is to say. Except thank-you to God for this blessed privilege and thank-you to all God's people, in heaven and on earth who have made that ministry possible.

Amen.

