

Our God of Surprises

One Sunday, the sermon kept referring to 'surprises'. I was surprised how the words managed to change a decision I thought I had made about the future. Then 4 days later another surprise arrived – in the bishop's 'notes to clergy'. It was an image referenced in her reflection.



On her desk is a triptych of Jesus: Jesus with a workers' belt around his waist / Jesus drinking a mug of tea / Jesus washing the dishes. What a reminder that Jesus came among us, not in glory but in humility, to serve, not to be served: a most surprising God, who keeps on surprising us.

I wonder – when you are washing the dishes, do you think of yourself as following the example of Jesus? When you set about a repair job, tools in your belt or pocket, are you aware of being like Jesus the carpenter? When you stop for a tea break, do you remember that, like Jesus, you are a labourer in God's workforce, worthy of refreshment?

So, let us not diminish the value of the ordinary tasks in our lives – for of such the kingdom of heaven is built. Henry Scott-Holland, a Professor of Divinity at Oxford, observed: *'The more you believe in the Incarnation, the more you care about drains.'*

Drains don't get appreciated enough – nor perhaps do plumbers unless our drains are blocked. The patron saint of plumbers is Vincent Ferrar, a 14th century Dominican with the gift for problem-solving? A plumber came to repair our leaking loo last week. We asked, 'Do you like your job?' and he surprisingly replied, 'I absolutely love it'.

Mary Sumner valued the people and the tasks that others saw as 'menial' and awakened us to the significance of the ordinary things, like dishes and sinks and tea breaks. Such tasks, undertaken with love, are foundational to family life and healthy communities. Our hands and feet are surprisingly good tools in God's plan. So be prepared for the God of surprises to engage you in surprising tasks or to change your plans! That's OK.

No wonder one of Mary's favourite hymns include the words

'Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love'