

Mayor's Civic Service 2019 (6.10.19)

2 Timothy 1: 1 – 14; Luke 17: 5 – 10

What's the magic word? I wonder how many parents or grandparents sitting here this morning have asked that question as some little cherub of theirs has been learning their manners, learning to say please and thank you. We all do it, don't we? "I want some juice!" "What's the magic word?"

Now, I have met Cllr Liam Dealtry's mother. And I know she's the sort of woman to have brought her kids up nice, according to the old school standards of decency and respect. And Cllr Dealtry might be sitting there today on the front row of Priory Church in all his finery with his scarlet robe and lacy jabot and black cocked hat, but I bet that even today Mr I'm the Mayor of Bridlington wouldn't dare speak to his mother and overlook the common courtesy of saying his please and thank yous.

But today also is the day when we *give thanks* to the Mayor and all that he represents. Of course when I say we give thanks to the Mayor, I don't just mean saying thank you to the man, Liam Dealtry. We all know that Liam is particularly enthusiastic and energetic mayor and many of us will be able to think of instances when we should like to say thank you to him. I'm sure there are people here who would like to say all sorts of other things to Liam as well! But in the context of a church service I'm not going to encourage to go there.

What I do want to encourage us to do is think about what the office of the mayor of a community like ours represents. And it's the whole civic infrastructure of public services. Not just the relatively small number of things that technically come out of the very restricted budget of the Town Council. But all of our public services, wherever the funding comes from, be it East Riding of Yorkshire Council, central government or wherever.

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We give thanks because we live in a society where there are roads and schools and a health service and police and ambulances and a fire service and social care and a benefits system for those who are unable to provide for themselves and so on and so on and so on and so on. And we give thanks that there are people who work in those services and that there are people who are elected to arrange those services. We give *to* them and we give thanks to God *for* them.

And well we might. Because when these things operate at their best, it is because people are offering of themselves out of a sense of public duty: they're not trying to line their own pockets; or further a career; or promote their own agenda. And they are certainly not doing it because they are *looking* for thanks.

The sad thing is that the breakdown of trust in public servants, which has been commented on now for more than two decades, has reached crisis point and is being expressed with a cynicism stoked by populist

politicians who are pitching public servants over and against the people at large. And this, of course, simply leads to a vicious circle of self-fulfilling prophecies as decent people will feel less and less inclined to enter public service.

We need to find a way of breaking out of the decline in the standards of public service and public discourse that we find ourselves in today. One way is to do precisely what we about in this service: to identify people who, at grass roots level, are serving their local communities in a non-partisan way, and to celebrate their achievements and to give thanks for them. Another way is to forge a commitment to reclaim the public square and to populate it with people of good will who will dedicate themselves to building up the common good.

But the inspiration for that cannot come out of thin air. It can only come out of a set of values which is continually renewed and fed and nurtured. And that is

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the purpose retelling the story of the Christian Gospel serves. It tells of how God's self completely empties himself to identify with us, to the extent of becoming a slave for us and being prepared to die for us. His willingness to reach into the depths of our humanity enables us to reach into the depths of his power. And when we do that we receive a divine command to which we are equipped to respond with joy. We have heard it proclaimed in the Bible reading that was read to us today that Jesus told his disciples "when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves; we have done only what we ought to have done!'"

As we give thanks for the Mayor of Bridlington and his fellow Town Councillors and all who serve our community, we pray for them and ask that they be joined by others who are inspired to do only what they ought to do.

Amen.