Sermon, Kingston ordination of priests, 4th July 2026

The time is surely coming when the fallen booth and the ruined stronghold will be rebuilt, and then even the mountains shall drip with sweet wine. “They shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon their land, and they shall never again be plucked up.”

Most of the book of Amos is the shepherd-prophet’s prophecy of judgment and disaster upon the hypocrisy and social injustice of the temporarily affluent and independent northern Kingdom of Israel.

Ony at its very end does the book conclude with today’s reading: a promise a future restoration of the remnant kingdom alongside other nations that the LORD may call.

We are directed back to “days of old”.

As it was in the time of King David, before the splitting and division of Edom and Judah, so shall it be in the end – one love; and with overflowing blessing and fruitfulness of the land.

We ourselves live in times when many are anxious about ruin. National flags flap at curious half-mast on lamp-posts here and there in the land, as if in partly inadvertent proclamation not merely of present social divisions but also past limitations and endemic failures.

These are hardly wedding flags for some happy couple.

Near where I live, counter-flaggers have also hung bunting of many nations’ flags between some lamp-posts. For my part, I find *these* installations much more visually cheerful and hopeful.

Yet salvation belongs to no flag, even if flags can also legitimately be loved for the goods that they cherish.

Our Christian imaginations must surely learn to linger in days of fasting and repentance on the hot droughts and floods of climate change, alongside our species’ many other ugly and unjust despoilings of the non-human lifeworld. Might not Amos today have spoken of these things?

And equally, we must learn always to see, both near and far, the casual cruelties of inter-human poverty and injustice, which Amos’s original audience likewise preferred to ignore.

All these things outstrip and condemn the cheaply potent drugs of petty and resentful nationalisms. They also give the lie to complacent ideologies of technological or moral “progress”.

Frail amid all these frailties – for, when they are honest, they are no less overwhelmed than anyone else – the churches nevertheless claim the grace to keep the hope of Christ in the midst of the world.

And *this*, surely, is where you come in: you who are here to be ordained as priests.

I am grateful to you.

I am not ordained. I believe I have not heard that call.

So, in this small moment of today's dedication and celebration, I stand before you more than a little like the unmarried preacher at a wedding.

As a lay person, I am greatly thankful to you, and for you. I know that you are rare and must be prized.

What you are offering of yourselves and what you have become and will become within human society makes you sweet vintage from miraculous mountain vineyards, new wine from precious grapes.

And so, I suppose one of my prayers for you, this bright noonday, is that the church will continue to recognise your vintage. You are not here today to be poured into the church as mere sacrament-ready refill. Your irreplaceable vintages will need to be allowed to foment within your own skins of increasingly fine wine.

And yet, of course, all these blessings of your newness will not mean superiority. As Jesus observes accurately in Luke's Gospel, even with self-irony, once people have tasted old wine they don't want the new because they say "the old is better".

The newness that you bring is a blessing that will require a supple container in which to continue to grow.

It is perhaps noteworthy how little in the Gospels Jesus seems to look *back*. Without the past, of course, Jesus of Israel has no identity to speak of. But his whole prejudice is for continual newness as the necessary condition for cherishing what already is.

And so I pray, likewise, that the church will recognise the freshness of each of your cloth, spun from the choice wool of your calling. You are not patches for short-lived repairs to what is worn — any more than any of us can patch our own worn-out-ness (for which of us not continually wearing out?) without allowing ourselves, over and again, to be spun anew, to the very end.

Shortly, Bishop Martin will address us all with beautiful and challenging words about your calling as priests.

You are to be servants and shepherds, to be messengers, watchpeople and stewards of the Lord; to teach and admonish, feed and provide. You are to seek the lost and confused and to guide them. You are to call hearers to repentance and declare forgiveness in the name of Christ. You are to preach the good message of the kingdom when the tree of Scripture stands laden with succulent meanings as also when it rests starkly bare in hidden anticipation of its season.

You are to bless people, resist evil, support the weak, defend the poor, intercede for all. You will minister to the sick and prepare people for their deaths. Through you, the people of Christ – whose many flags compose his finally flagless although many-coloured face – will be built up in unity and in faith.

Are you ready for all this? Are you?

Are any of us in our different baptismal callings towards each other?

Upon other days we shall fast and mourn – as we should; as we must.

But *this* feast day let us not worry or be afraid! For, the bridegroom is with us, within us and between us.

The vintage which we each offer is today received and shared, miraculously, as aged to perfection as at the wedding banquet of the world.

And amongst us are those who will bless us all by presiding at this joyful foretaste of the wedding banquet week after week, time out of time.

We are at the wedding! May joy be uncontained.

Amen