

**Address given by The Very Revd Sam Wright, Dean of Connor  
at the Ordination of Ven David McClay as Bishop of Down and Dromore  
25 January 2020 in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast**

**A Brave, Bright, Beautiful Gospel - 2 Corinthians 4:1-10**

Choosing a Bishop can be a demanding task! In the Church of Ireland, we seem to be choosing new Bishops frequently at present. I heard of one electoral college where the members were into their final meeting without reaching an agreement. Then a member of the college spoke out. He said, I would like you to listen to a letter from another applicant. It reads as follows:

“Dear members of the electoral college, I should like to apply for the vacant position of Bishop in your Diocese. I have many qualifications. I’ve been a preacher with much success and also had some success as a writer. Some say I’m a good organiser. I’ve been a leader most places I have been. I’m over 50 years of age and have never preached in one place for more than three years. In some places, I have left town after my work caused riots and disturbances. I must admit I have been in jail three or four times, but not because of any real wrongdoing. My health is not too good, though I still accomplish a great deal. The churches I have preached in have been small, though located in several large cities. I’ve not gotten along well with religious leaders in the towns where I have preached. In fact, some have threatened to kill me, and even attacked me physically. I am not too good at keeping records. I have been known to forget who I have baptised. However, if you can use me, I promise to do my best and to serve faithfully as your Bishop.”

After reading this letter, the member of the electoral college turned to the other members and asked, “Well, what do you think? Shall we elect him as our Bishop?”

The other members of the college were appalled! They said, “You’re asking us to consider a sickly, troublemaker, who’s absent minded and an ex-con? Have you lost your mind?”

“Who signed the letter? Who has such colossal audacity and nerve?”

Their fellow member, looked intently at the electoral college members before replying, “It’s signed, ‘The Apostle Paul.’”

Let me assure you that any similarity to the Down and Dromore electoral college is a mere coincidence.

On a more serious note, the members of an electoral college carry out an important and detailed task. I want to congratulate those involved in the election of David McClay, as the new Bishop of Down and Dromore, on a job well done.

I also want to pay tribute to some people who so often get forgotten, the families of those who serve in church leadership. First of all, David’s Mum and Dad. We are the men and women we are, because of our families. That is particularly true of David, the son of Roly and Kathleen McClay from Donegal. I have had the privilege of knowing them for a very long time and they have stood with David in times of great joy and also been there for him at times of devastating sadness. They have modelled the Christian life and upheld their son in prayer every step of the way.

Thirty-five years ago, David and I began college together - we quickly became friends. David then married his first wife Irene and they were overjoyed when their daughter Cherith was born. Within a few short years, joy turned to sorrow when Irene died, after bravely battling cancer. The journey through Irene’s death and bringing up a young daughter was difficult, while also being a young

Rector and running the vibrant Parish of Kilkeel. And it was during these tough years that David learnt the importance of completely trusting and relying on his Lord and Saviour.

Some years later, a young woman called Hilary called to see me, and my wife Paula, to chat about a Christian Festival. Our conversation quickly turned to her finding out what sort of person David was. But unbeknown to her, David had tipped us off that this was someone he thought he might like to get to know better, so we were tasked with finding more out about her!

Having married and moved to Willowfield, David and Hilary's family grew as Cherith was joined by Ruth and Jordan, who have brought much joy and fun to their lives. In the past year however, with the birth of his little granddaughter, Annie, David now has a new apple of his eye. And whilst he is totally besotted with her, it is Hilary who has remained a constant rock and inspiration to David. In addition to their leadership roles in the Parish and Community association, and their wider church roles, they jointly lead New Wine Ireland - which is best known for the Summer Conference Week in Sligo - but also provides leadership training and events throughout the year.

Family is the precious hidden gem in the church, they love, encourage, worry and pray for us as vulnerable leaders. As I pay tribute to the support and love the McClay Family have been to David, I also pay tribute to the families who have the backs of all church leaders.

What is the new Bishop to do? - Well I'm hoping he has learnt something about the role during his time as Archdeacon!

Seriously though, it is clear from past experience that David will do many things, but I want to encourage him to keep to the main thing - to share the Good news of Jesus. And as the chief shepherd for the people of Down and Dromore Diocese to encourage, enable and equip the church, to bring this Good News to the world. In this era of scepticism and rejection by many of the Christian Gospel, he will need to be Brave, and to offer a Bright and Beautiful Gospel to all.

2 Corinthians 4:5-6 - "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ."

## **A Brave Gospel**

In his life and in his sharing of Christ, David has courageously sought to change lives through his teaching and explanation of the word of God and through the power of the Holy Spirit. He has been a champion for the poor. He has spoken out against violence when it would have been easier to stay silent. Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:4 are as true today as ever - "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see light of the gospel." It takes courage to shine out the gospel into the darkness of the world. David, in your new role, Be Brave.

An example of a man who bravely shared Christ, wherever he went was Bishop Festo Kivengere. He was a courageous African evangelist, widely known as the Billy Graham of Africa. He tells this story about himself, from before he became a Christian:

"I remember leading a group of fighters to attack a Christian family at night. We were ordered to do it because they were hard core resisters. But to my surprise they loved us. The man said he was not at all afraid to die, for he would immediately be with Jesus. Then he pleaded with us, not for his life, but for ours, that we awake and repent while there was still time.

“However, we killed him, but he died praying, ‘Father, forgive them and give them time to turn about.’ We went back to the forest, but the face of that man and his love never left me. His Jesus had found me, and now I want to tell everyone about him, I want to tell everyone about Jesus.”

When Jesus finds us, he is our inspiration to proclaim the Gospel. It is little wonder then that speaking of the man who was killed, Bishop Festo poses the question: “How do you destroy Christians like that? - You beat them; they love you. You put them to shame; they think you have given them an opportunity to be creative. You kill them and they win you!”

Be Brave, that’s what Jesus told his disciples as he sent them out to make disciples: “You are called to go and make disciples baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19-20).

David has often heard the call to go. He has travelled widely to the Arctic, Korea, Lebanon, Africa and to the Diocese of Albany in the USA. He will, as Bishop, undertake further travel and learn many new things from the lives of brave and persecuted believers, and this will continue to inspire his witness, teaching and sharing of Christ. It is this worldwide fellowship of brave believers that will constantly reignite his passion and stir up your Bishop to be a courageous leader and to call everyone in his diocese, and beyond, to bravely go and make disciples. So, encourage him in this.

## **A Bright Gospel**

As you may have noticed on the invitation to this service, on this day we celebrate ‘The Conversion of St Paul.’ When Paul first encountered Jesus, it was a bright blinding light and a word from the Lord, that caused him to be struck blind. Later he was healed, and his eyes – both spiritually and physically – were opened to see the glory of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:1-19). Today more than ever the world needs to see Christ’s glory radiating out into our streets and communities and to hear and experience a bright and powerful gospel message. David, you are called then to motivate and lead your people to shine out Brightly for Christ with the good news of salvation.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians telling them to shine out brightly into the darkness, he was reflecting his own conversion experience. He had been on his way to Damascus to persecute and kill Christians, when suddenly that light shone around him from heaven and his life changed forever. Our society has many hurting, broken and poor people, of all ages, who are struggling without hope, their world is dark. There are those who have successful careers, are financially secure, have loving families, yet they are engulfed by darkness and feel lost and alone. Matthew 5:14 in The Message Version of the Bible says, “You are here to be light bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city set on a hill.”

David, you have never shied away from doing this. As you find yourself dealing with the people and issues of a large diocese, recall your own conversion experience and how God’s bright light broke into the darkness of your life. Flooding people’s lives with the hope found in the good news of the gospel, bringing out the God-colours into the world, that is to be your primary aim as a Bishop.

Last year I had the privilege of taking a sabbatical. I took the opportunity to attend a Distinctive Leadership course in London. It is a course that accepts participants from many walks of life, young people setting out on their careers, business people who come seeking refreshment and inspiration and some who serve in churches or are setting out to plant new churches. A group of go ahead, and in many ways successful people, people one might think who don’t need to hear the gospel message, perhaps because they already know him.

On the final evening of the course, the renowned preacher R.T. Kendall, came to speak to us. He spoke on the importance of keeping the gospel as the main thing. He spoke of the power and purpose

of the gospel, and of how the gospel is the power of God for salvation. He reminded and warned us if we were ashamed of the gospel, Jesus will be ashamed of us. Then, in a gathering where it seemed everyone had everything they needed in life, he asked those who didn't know Christ as their personal saviour to confess their sins, to invite Jesus into their lives and to receive the Holy Spirit. After leading us in prayer, he asked those who had received the Lord Jesus to stand. Ten people stood, having given their lives to Christ. RT had clearly shone the light and love of the gospel and ten were added to the Kingdom.

Bishops, and all who know Jesus, are called to go public and present the gospel message to the world as they shine out their light in Jesus name.

If you are here today and you haven't yet put your trust in Jesus, don't put it off. Know he loves you, know he longs to forgive your sins, give you a hope and a future and life abundant. Today his arms are open wide ready to welcome you into his Kingdom. So be brave and let Christ light up your life with his good news.

### **A Beautiful Gospel**

We have just celebrated a family wedding. It was my son's wedding earlier this month and of course we love talking about it and talking about his bride Louise and how truly stunning and beautiful a bride she was. But as Christians we have an even more beautiful name to share, a beautiful, wonderful and powerful name it is - the name of Jesus.

Jesus is the light of the world; Jesus is the hope of salvation and the one who has prepared a place in heaven for all who confess him as Lord. It is in his name that all Christians are united as we proclaim Jesus as the way, the truth and life. It is in and through the powerful name of Jesus, through his paying the cost of our sin on the cross, that the darkness of the world is cast out and the beautiful light of Christ brings new life.

I love this description from the Message Bible of a bright and beautiful gospel transforming lives in 2 Corinthians 4:6: "God said, 'Light up the darkness!' and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful."

Someone David and I both came to know and love, was his late father-in-law, the Revd Teddy Saunders. On 21st October 1994, he spoke to us on what the church ought to be known for. He said:

"Above all the church should be known for its love." He continued, "We are created to enjoy God. We should delight and love what other people are doing in their denominations and churches. We don't have weapons to deal with the injustices of the world except love, this is why Jesus said, 'Love your enemies and love one another.' The Bible makes clear what love is: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3:16) and 'This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.' (1 John 4:10). God wanted somebody to love and so he made us - He first loved us. We are therefore very precious in his sight.

"Therefore, Jesus gave this word to those who followed him in John 15, and it is an important word for the church today. 'By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you love one another.' In our own strength none of us can do it, we are dependent on God and the Holy Spirit to empower us: to enable us to love as He has loved us."

David, as you begin this next season of life as the Bishop of Down and Dromore, may those words from Teddy guide you as you share God's message of love and salvation. And as you take up your new role, be assured of my prayers and support.

To each person gathered here today, I implore you, pray for this man of God. Pray that God will pour out his Holy Spirit day and daily upon him and pray that he will always keep close to his saviour and Lord. Pray too for Hilary and their family as they support David in his new role.

Finally, David lead with courage. In times of strength, and of weakness, Be Brave. 'Light up the darkness!' as you continue to teach the Beautiful Gospel of Christ and reach out in love to build the kingdom of God.

By keeping to the main thing, sharing the good news of forgiveness and abundant new life in Christ, I pray your ministry as Bishop, and the ministry of those you lead, will bear great fruit for His kingdom. Amen.