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THE LORD MAYOR OF WESTMINSTER CIVIC SERVICE - WESTMINSTER ABBEY 5TH JULY 2015

One of the great joys of a life in ministry is being called to bear witness to the remarkable courage and beauty in what are mistakenly called ordinary lives. But there is nothing ordinary about a life lived out with the qualities of love and service in relationship with others.

A Christian life breaks down the contemporary world's attempts to compartmentalize our lives and communities. There is a wholeness where faith and its blessings break into, and inform, all the different aspects of our lives.

Our passage from St Paul's letter to the Colossians describes how Christian faith imparts knowledge characterized by creativity. A knowledge which is not only ethical, honest, virtuous and high minded, but is set apart by a love defined by 'compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience' Paul tells us. This love involves respect for all people, whether Christian or not. A true celebration of the richness in our society is not born out of a tolerance of difference, but rather a celebration of diversity in a spirit of Christian love. We are united when our common desire is that each member of our society should have the opportunity to flourish.

As the prophet Joel makes plain grace, mercy, our gifts and blessings, are given to us by God in abundance across the generations. The example of Jesus Christ's ideal of self-sacrificing love provides a model of servant leadership for us all.

For more than twenty years it has been my blessing to call my Lord Mayor, the Lady Flight, Christabel my friend.

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Christabel has always recognized the blessings God has given her in her life, even when they have come in unexpected ways. She has a rich, intuitive understanding that our gifts are given to us to be shared. As for the creativity that a Christian understanding of the world imparts – well – no one could accuse Christabel of being a spectator in her own life. And there is a servant's humility beneath her enthusiasm to get things done and make the City of Westminster a more hospitable community.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in her work with the Sir Simon Milton Foundation which she initiated some three years ago. Christabel describes her late friend, Simon Milton, as her mentor. The foundation has at its heart his vision of a caring city that offers opportunity for all. It seeks to help young people to get on in the world through education, which is pragmatically and creatively suited to what they want to do in life. It also works to value and involve older residents in the life of the community, to address issues of isolation and loneliness through initiatives like Silver Sunday. Wherever we engage in acts of generosity and service, for no other purpose than it is the right thing to do, we follow Jesus' example and witness God's purpose being worked out in the world through love.

There is servanthood in Christabel's care for those she works with and those she encounters - a desire for them to flourish. She understands the needs and blessings of bringing different people and their gifts together in a common and generous purpose. All this is born of a practical faith.

It is God's Holy Spirit which inspires each of us to this work where our hearts are open.

Where we are forgiven by God we are called to forgive.

Where we are loved by God we are called to love. Unless

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we clothe ourselves in love nothing can be perfected; there is no pretence in love.

My Lord Mayor may be clothed in the finery of her office today but in truth her life is clothed Christian love defined by the 'compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience' which St Paul speaks of. In Christabel's case this might be characterized as a generous spirit of humble disposition with a willingness to be pragmatic, to persevere with forbearance, in order to make her corner of the world a better place filled with hospitality and opportunity. I thank God for Christabel's bright Christian witness and ask God's blessing on her and her work in this Mayoral year.

Amen.