Lord, what we know not teach us, and what we are not make us, in Jesus’s name, Amen.

It’s wonderful to be here at last. Thank you for the marvellous welcome and for the memorable service to which so many of you contributed last Sunday. We are truly grateful and I am thrilled to be here. We moved into our house on Friday - we can just about negotiate a passage from room to room through the boxes; and if I am limping, it's not because I’ve been wrestling with an angel through the night, but because I'm not used to going up and downstairs with such heavy weights to shift.

Moving and transition were well known to the great figure of Moses - one of the three or four greatest figures from the Old Testament scriptures, who is centre stage in our Old Testament reading this morning. We see him as a man of prayer, in a deep conversation with God. That's the picture we have. And so I want to say a word about Moses and about praying. Moses is also leading a people, so there is an important sense of journeying together; and journeying together is what we shall be doing in the coming years. I want to say a few words about that. And thirdly, a word about the vital importance of what we are called to become, which is a community of praise offering its life to God. For what we share is the good news of Jesus Christ, and our glad hearts will want to express this over and over again.

Moses and our praying

So to Moses first. Moses is a remarkable figure – marked out and rescued from his earliest childhood, rising to be a prince in Egypt, then exiled, until his life-changing encounter with the living God at the burning bush. He encounters there the one who is – the ‘I am who I am’ - being itself. Moses looks at the burning bush and he sees an inextinguishable flame. Burning out? Never! And from this God, Moses receives his call and his commission to lead people out of slavery and into the Promised Land. In the exodus from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses knew that God was with him and that the proper response was one of praise. In the desert, signs of God’s presence abound - not least in the manna from above.

What we notice on and off through the Exodus experience is that God and Moses converse. It seems as if God listens to Moses. Just before our reading this morning, we have the incident of the golden calf - the idol which the Israelites wanted to worship. God tells Moses how angry he is, and Moses pleads with him: don’t let the Egyptians mock us. They'll say you weren’t really on our side at all. God listens to Moses and he relents. Again in the passage that we’ve just heard, Moses speaks to God as if this is a real and serious conversation having consequences. ‘Give me a sign please. I trust you, but give me a clue’. Moses is a person of prayer who takes prayer seriously, because he knows that God takes prayer seriously.
Few of us – no, make that none of us - are called to be leaders like Moses, nor will our conversations with God be as freighted with such momentous significance. But all of us are called to pray and can pray.

What is prayer? It is living with God. Prayer is living with God. It is facing his will for us, trying to discern and understand his will for us, trying to make sense of what he is asking us to do. Prayer is living with God. Making time every day to ask what of our good desires we wish him to multiply and realise; what of our less good desires we wish him to eliminate or diminish; and to ask (on reflection at the end of the day): where were you, God, in the day that has just passed? So Moses the man of prayer can prompt our own praying, which under it all has God's deep and abiding love for us as we are. And by the way: where would we be if God didn't give us all a second chance?

Journeying together

Secondly, Moses does not of course pray for himself alone. He is no egoist, no chronic individualist. He is the man who is serving others, mediating God's will to the people of Israel. Notice how insistently, even how relentlessly, Moses asks God about the people he has been asked to lead into the Promised Land. Moses is journeying together with the children of Israel. Of course they exasperate him beyond measure, they are tiresome and difficult and irritable, but he loves them and he has a mission to lead them. To God, he says: ‘Show us your ways. Journey with us. How else will we accomplish what we have to accomplish?’

All of us here are on our own journeys, and we in this great cathedral are journeying together with hope and conviction that God is with us.... And we will be looking for signs of his presence as we make that journey into the future that God wills for us. To journey together as people of prayer is to sustain a great faith and hope in the goodness of God. And that brings me to my third point.

Becoming a community of praise

My third point is that every day we are building ourselves into a community of praise, glad at what God is doing in our lives, glad at what God is doing in this place in his renewing work of reconciliation. We are glad because we know what are the benefits of people and communities reconciled. And we are a community of praise because we know that this reconciliation and renewal is taking its cue and origin from the reconciling work of God in Jesus Christ in whose face the glory of God shone.

Let us then commit ourselves to be people of prayer, in a serious conversation with God who loves us and listens to us and takes us seriously. Let us journey together as people under the prompting lead of Jesus Christ; and let us be people who are full of gratitude at the goodness of God becoming ever more a community of praise in company with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

AMEN