

Reflecting on the journey so far

By Kate Lees

As I graduate from Spurgeon's College at the age of 33, I think back to the Summer of 1992; the Summer of my 19th birthday and my critical 'A' level results. I remember at the time having little belief and even less hope of passing those exams. I knew the expectation was to progress through the levels of education, to get a good job, to settle down and to give my parents, among others, peace of mind. I knew this was the path that all young people were expected to follow. I knew in many ways this was the ideal way of life, but somehow I also knew that this was not going to be me.

As I found myself walking away from the euphoria of others that day, knowing that, once again, my results weren't good enough, I don't remember being surprised. I simply remember turning to my friend, as we stood outside the college, and saying, "Do you know what I am going to do now? I'm going to work for God". I don't really know what I meant when I said those words, whether I saw this as a viable option, or a career choice, or really the only way left to go, but I distinctly remember saying them and I also remember that when I said them, it felt good and it felt right.

Looking back it could be said that after my 'A' level results I followed them wholeheartedly. A year on an Oasis Frontline team, two years with the Oasis Trust Evangelism and Schools team, and nine years as a youth worker at Herne Hill Baptist Church would seem to prove this to be true. However, the truth is that I never saw it that way. In all honesty, up until my acceptance to train as a Baptist minister I saw what I did as an undetected accident. I felt I was not good enough to do anything else, that somehow I had smuggled myself into this line of work and if I kept my head down, maybe no one would notice that I wasn't supposed to be there.

This is not to say that I didn't enjoy the jobs I found myself in. In the most part I loved them, especially working in the Church, I saw this as my life and it was so exciting for me. In all honesty I could think of no other job that I desired to do even if I had got the best 'A' level results in the world. However, despite this, deep down I was always waiting for the moment when someone would find out that actually I wasn't supposed to be there. That I was a fraud, that I wasn't qualified and it was about time I left. Looking back I think I was always waiting for someone to inform me that I couldn't do the job I loved doing.

It wasn't until I went to Spurgeon's College in 2004 that I was challenged about how I felt. It was at Spurgeon's that people started to inquire as to why I wasn't training for Baptist Ministry. I had decided to study because I needed more depth and challenge and was surprised that instead of being exposed as a fraud, I was challenged to take another step with God. This was puzzling for me. Why wasn't I training to be a minister? Why if I loved the Church, loved God, loved 'working for Him' was I not training for a role that enabled me to live out this dream? The most honest answer I could find was that I was scared; I didn't think I could do it, I had never thought I could do it, and I knew I wasn't good enough. I was frightened.

Questions whirled around in my head, how did I know if I was called? Was my life good enough to enter into ministry? Should I not have had a 'sign' from God? Was I simply entertaining these thoughts because I was unable to do anything else? Why would God possibly choose me to do His work? I remember the doubt and questioning well, at times I live with it today, but I also remember the moment my

letter of recognition came through the door. I had been interviewed two days before and was waiting to see if the Baptist Union would recognise me to train for ministry.

I was on my own at home when the letter arrived telling me I had been accepted, and I will never forget the moment I opened it. It was as if the words I had spoken on the day of my exam results 12 years before had finally come to pass. I knew God had gently guided me to this point, letting me take tiny step after tiny step until I could accept the call He had given me. It was a moment of clarity that I have never had before or since. It was a moment of confirmation on my life and my role in life that caused me to relax. I knew for the first time, with all my being, that this was what God has always intended me to do.

Of course since that moment life has been harder then ever. In continuing to take steps for God I have found myself doing things I never thought I would ever do. Sitting with people in situations, which break my heart, and sharing with others at times of great privacy and joy. Training as a Baptist minister has taken me to the end of myself. I often say if I knew it was going to be like this I would never have done it, but then I guess that is why I never knew. I know things will probably get harder as I leave college and step into a new situation. I know as a female minister people will see me in many different ways, a mislead woman, a brave woman, a faithful woman, a woman who is stepping outside her role. For me I am simply a woman who has found her place in life and prays that God will give her the strength to live it out each day.

Kate Lees has recently graduated from Spurgeon's College and is employed as the Assistant Minister at Herne Hill Baptist Church. She is married to Simon and enjoys holidays where she can relax in the sun with a good book and an ice tea.