



“I choose you”

Integrated member Hannah from Oxford reflects on her year in community.

A week before we first met as a Community, I sent a text to my friend who'd been in the Community last year and who had persuaded me to apply. I said, 'this is a really bad idea, I shouldn't be doing this.' She said, 'give me one reason why.' I replied with eleven. When we were last gathered in this room together, I was so happy to be here, but couldn't shake the nagging feeling that I was fraud, that I'd been let in by administrative error, and that I was going to have to do something spectacular to earn my place here. Before I joined St Anselm, seven years of studying and three theology degrees had made me a smartass who could talk with confidence about God's love, but who had, along the way, annexed knowledge of God's love to my head and away from my heart.

A few months ago, I looked back on the eleven reasons I sent my friend for why this was a bad idea. They had a common theme I hadn't realised at the time: why would anyone choose me? Why would anyone choose me, let alone super Christians which must be the criteria for getting to hang out at Lambeth Palace?

And then here we were, a bit nervous, arms hanging in slightly unnatural fashion as the albs were so alien to us. And we said 'I choose you.'

To say 'I choose you' has been the most extraordinary gift both to give and to receive; we have said it not just in our words, but in our actions, from the deep moments in sharing groups, to the beautifully mundane moments around washing up stations; from the communal prayers offered in sacred thin places, to the unexpected yet wonderful intimacy bred in silence together.

And we still say 'I choose you' even when someone puts salt in the chocolate sauce, rather than sugar, but you're on a silent retreat, so you can't do anything about it!

I have been transformed by those three words 'I choose you.' Out of all the words in our Rule of Life, it is those three I really have carried with me each day, in so many ordinary and extraordinary moments throughout this year. Because 'I choose you' gives you permission to be vulnerable. 'I choose you' says 'I love you' not because I have to, but because Christ is in you and that, to me, is irresistible. 'I choose you' says God chooses you. The God, the God who went to magnificent, cosmos-shattering, death-defeating lengths to bring you back to Himself. 'I choose you' undoes the lie I believed that I had to earn my place here to belong, and ultimately, undid the lie I had been believing for years, that I had to earn, to strive, to desperately beg, for God's love.

I began this year craving a spiritual boot-camp which would finally make me good enough, worthy enough. Instead, this has been a year of God saying 'I love you.' In many ways this year, nothing has changed yet everything has; I am no more loved by God than I was at the start of this year, but now I know deep within me that extraordinary and transformative love of Jesus Christ. We have all learned how to be loved this year. There's no deep secret, it's no elusive spiritual discipline, it's in the gift God gives to us and which we give to one another, contained within those three remarkable words: I choose you.

Why not choose to join us?