

## **Address to the Edinburgh Diocesan Synod**

24<sup>th</sup> October 2019

As we approach the season of AGMs, may I offer you a gentle challenge? In our Growing Together process we identified five themes which describe the priorities of our calling: to serve our communities, engage all generations, enable ministry, develop disciples and share faith. So my challenge to you is, whether as a Vestry report or the Rector/Priest-in-Charge report, to describe the past year under these headings. What seeds have you sown, what harvest have you gathered over the last year? And what are you planning to do under the same headings in 2020? And to add perhaps another question: in what ways have you as a congregation grown in your togetherness, whether with others in your church or with people beyond your church – other congregations, other denominations, other community partners?

You won't find that our Synod agenda fits so neatly under these five headings, but you will find plenty of nuts and bolts stuff that makes our continuing mission possible. You will hear of interesting new linkages drawing once separate charges together. You will hear of our determination to support one another in getting safeguarding matters right. And you will have the opportunity to take stock of our financial position as a diocese and to consider how finance supports our mission going forward into 2020.

I fully recognise that this is a two way process. Whilst this synod, through its committees and officers seeks to support you, a huge proportion of the money that allows us to do this comes from your giving and the giving of people in your churches. We are, in short, committed to one another, dependent on one another, and this comes from our shared dependency on Christ Jesus.

You will also have noticed from a close perusal of the papers that a significant expenditure will be made next year to pay our dues towards the Lambeth Conference – a gathering to which all Anglican bishops and their spouses are invited. This is in part because richer provinces are asked to support the poorer – and rightly so. It's a long conference, lasting two weeks, but shorter this time than last to keep the costs lower. But I hope that, if we are going to invest this much money in sending our bishop off to Canterbury next July, we can hold one or two events to draw the whole diocese into a deeper understanding of the history and life of the Anglican Communion and of the major issues the conference will be discussing. We shall, in the week before the Conference, be hosting a number of bishops from across the world as guests to the diocese, and I hope you may have the opportunity to meet

them in your church. We already have a brunch planned for our young people to meet our guests. We shall let you know as soon as we have other dates fixed. But if you have ideas, or want to bid for a bishop to spend time with your congregation, just let me know.

Another theme you will hear more and more about will be our Provincial Year of Pilgrimage in 2021. I won't go into detail here, but look out for Provincial and Diocesan pilgrimages and think about what you might plan locally. There are so many riches in this theme, so much to help us grow spiritually and to grow in our common life too. For we believe that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Word of God, Lantern to our feet. Through the theme and practice of pilgrimage, we are invited to walk with God and one another, seeking God's guidance and God's sustenance for the journey. And in so doing we seek to grow in discipleship and unity.

I put all these things up front in this address because the life of the church goes on and the life of discipleship lies open before us, full of blessings and new life. But we know too that disciples live in and must seek to love God and neighbour in the world as it is. And the world we live in faces two significant crises, understanding a crisis, that is, as a time of decision.

The first of these is around Brexit. I went on at length at the last Synod about this and won't bore you with my opinions again. Except to acknowledge that whatever happens on 31<sup>st</sup> October there is much more unhappiness and conflict to come including, for us in Scotland, the likelihood of a further independence referendum sometime soon.

The second crisis is far greater than Brexit, it's the climate crisis. I don't think I need to spell out the seriousness of the situation – it's brought home daily to us by the world's younger generations and by the actions of Extinction-Rebellion. It already affects us and we know that some of the world's smallest and poorest nations are facing disaster because of rising sea levels. Just as Brexit has posed hard questions to us about the values that sustain our nation, the values that we believe are important as Christians, so the Climate Crisis asks us what we're doing to be God's stewards both of the world and the creatures that live upon it.

We are resurrection people and the often spoken words of the resurrected Jesus should always be in our minds and on our lips. 'Peace be with you.' 'Do not be afraid.' It's important for us to hear this message and to share it with others. But I recognize that in the context of crisis it isn't always easy to say these words and mean them, to say them without it sounding as if we're in utter denial. Yet, isn't it true that when we

act out of fear and anxiety we often make bad decisions? And when God's peace doesn't move us our hearts are set on something less than God?

When Jesus tells us not to worry about tomorrow, he doesn't mean that we should be oblivious to or casual about the consequences of our actions. What he means is that our actions now shouldn't be moved by panic or fear about what tomorrow might hold, but out of a very present trust in God. This mustn't make us complacent or lacking in urgency, nor does it excuse us from rigorous self-examination and penitence, but it does counsel against despair. The God we have known, the God we now know, will be the God we shall know. And the message of self-denial in order that we and others may know life in all its fullness is not only familiar to us but Christians through the ages have developed many resources from which we can draw. Christians of every age, even facing terrible odds, have been strengthened and inspired by Jesus' words, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid; trust in God, trust also in me.'

It's not easy. And ancient myths, of Eden and the Flood tell us that human beings have an incredible capacity to damage not only their own future but that of the ecosystems of the planet we depend upon. But both those stories indicate that God doesn't give up on us but continues to call us to be faithful as God is faithful.

Joel 2, from which our first reading was taken in our Eucharist just now, speaks of a creation in which the soil need not fear neither should the animals of the field. It pictures a world full of plenty, full of confidence and hope. Why? Because the Lord is in the midst of the people and the Lord's Spirit is poured out on all flesh. It offers a vision for **our** future not just the future of the ancient Israelites – and what we know now, more than we have ever known, is that it's a future we have the ability to shape. But we shall only finally do that when we not only recognise the things of God that are in the midst of us but make them known to others, so that we and they may live by the Spirit and the values of God.

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