

# Address to the Edinburgh Diocesan Synod

## 13<sup>th</sup> March 2021

I was looking back at my synod address of last March and discovered that much of what I said then was rendered redundant within weeks. Not the bigger picture stuff like our need to respond to the climate crisis or, indeed, to take advantage of the global climate summit in Glasgow, COP 26 (rearranged for this autumn), but in the detailed plans we laid before you. If God laughs at human plans then there's been much laughter in heaven over the past year.

Weeping in heaven too, let it be said, at the human anguish of loss and fear and loneliness across God's world. We all have tales to tell of personal tragedy and of love and self-sacrifice too. It's been hard, it's been profoundly instructive, and it leaves us changed in ways we're still assessing.

It's appropriate to acknowledge at this gathering our gratitude to ministry teams, Vestries and others who've shouldered huge burdens this year – sustaining pastoral care of the most vulnerable, reaching out into our communities, devising patterns of creative online worship and sharing the old, old story in new ways. And when the time came, painstakingly doing all that was necessary to reopen our church buildings safely.

None of us has been immune to the stresses of lockdown – some of us have suffered very seriously as a result. And no matter how resilient we are we've nevertheless found ourselves behaving oddly at times, of getting things out of proportion of being quick to take offence.

We're still working all this out because we remain immersed in the experience. But we already know that some things that seemed very important to us last March now seem entirely trivial. We can let them go. Other things that were stopped by Covid we're eager to see relaunched, perhaps in new ways. Our enforced abstinence from so much has also helped us to take a fresh look at ourselves and, yes, perhaps to listen more attentively to God, to rediscover the riches of our faith and also to awaken to new opportunities. And, almost certainly, we shall discover that some of the things we thought we learnt during the pandemic and even became very

passionate about will turn out to be snares and delusions as our world and church return to whatever will pass for normal in years to come.

In the meantime, I encourage you to continue to be kind to yourselves and to others. I also repeat the message from the College of Bishops that no one should feel under pressure to reopen church buildings for Holy Week and Easter. Some will want to, and that's fine, others will want to take things more gently knowing that the restrictions on numbers may mean that it's better to stay online for this great festival, and that's fine too. There is no need to turn the reopening into an opportunity to pressurize clergy, who are already under enough pressure. Reopening can only happen if Vestry and clergy are in agreement – this is an opportunity to show a united face and to protect on another.

I'm tempted to quote the chorus of Bobby McFerrin's song that encourages a laid-back attitude to life: 'Don't worry; be happy.' But more pertinently let me quote Jesus: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.' Or again, 'can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?' Or again, 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' My point isn't to excuse inactivity or passivity but rather to suggest the right way of approaching our activity. Knowing our need of God – as I reflected earlier in the Eucharist – believing that God is utterly trustworthy and faithful.

In this bewildering world, there is a constancy to God's love – constantly calling us to newness, constantly disorientating and reorientating us, always beside us on the road.

Let us pray:

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us  
O'er the world's tempestuous sea;  
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,  
For we have no help but thee;  
Yet, possessing every blessing  
If our God our father be.  
Amen.

**The Rt Revd Dr John Armes  
Bishop of Edinburgh**