

Good morning. I'm so sorry not to be with you.

The fact I'm talking to you in this way, however, tells us two things. First, that Covid-19 hasn't done with us yet, indeed, we're told it's likely to be our uncomfortable companion for the foreseeable future. Second, that we've had to learn new ways to do things – communicating through video being only one example of this. And we can be grateful for that. It's amazing what we can do when we need to.

If I had been with you this morning, I would have reflected on the War in Ukraine and our response to it – theological and practical. Perhaps I might simply underline here that my Lent Appeal for The Welcoming (which you'll hear more about in a moment) seems even more pertinent now as we look to receive Ukrainian refugees alongside those from Afghanistan already amongst us. I know many of us are eager to respond to the dire need we see daily on our screens and are frustrated that the government has been so slow. We must continue to press the priority of all this, to write to MPs and MSPs, to protest, to make a noise, not just for the sake of families fleeing from horror but also for a worryingly large number of orphans. Alongside this, I would suggest, supporting generously an organization that works directly with refugees is part of the welcoming we can do something about immediately.

The war in Ukraine, of course, is not the only crisis we face. The world we now live in is unstable and fluid. That's nothing new for the majority of the world's population, but for many of us in Scotland perhaps it is. The consequence of all this is that the 'new normal' that people keep talking about, is a long way off. We are going to face challenges over the next few years that may test our deepest Christian convictions and require us to stand up for what we believe in new and unexpected ways.

As you will hear at different points in this synod, our various committees are beginning to address some of these uncertainties. One clear priority has been to provide support for our clergy, many of whom are exhausted. Thus, we are introducing a revamped Ministerial Review scheme, a renewed pattern of ongoing training opportunities, and an extra day at our annual clergy conference.

I am so grateful to those clergy who provide holiday cover for colleagues – all the more vital at the moment. I'm grateful too to those charges who generously encourage their clergy to serve the wider diocese, whether on our

Committees, or as Interim Pastors during vacancies or, more specifically, as Synod Clerk, Bishop's Chaplain and Dean. Thank you, and all the more so this morning to those last three!

We are also exploring ways to release some new funds for mission – for example, modest support for charges where there is a potential for growth or, looking at mission in a different way, enabling us collectively to move towards that carbon zero target – sharply focused now by the dramatic rise in energy prices.

These are hard times – much harder for some than for others, let's be honest about that. But faith isn't just for sunny weather. When the storms blow and lightning strikes that's when we must call upon all our capital reserves – and I don't mean money, I mean our reserves of hope, faithfulness and love, of which our church is full. To be a holy people, as we heard in our readings earlier, learning to love our enemies every bit as much as we love our sisters and brothers.

Given that 'all this' isn't going to be 'over' we need to learn both to pace ourselves and to live with the world as it now is. To endure. To be a people (if I may misquote the prophet Micah) who do justice, act with kindness and walk humbly with the God we know in Jesus Christ.

Have a good Synod.