

Edinburgh Diocesan Synod - February 25th 2023

'I'm not optimistic, but I'm hopeful.' I often hear people saying that. And I think we know what they mean. Hopefulness and optimism are close allies, but they aren't the same. Optimism can ebb and flow according to mood and circumstances, yet even at our most pessimistic, when human fallibility in church, in nation, in the world loom large, hope for Christians remains undaunted. Our hope is built on Christ, on the discovery that true life lies in the way of the cross and that God, even now, is building a new heaven and a new earth. This is why, as St Peter says, we are to be ready to give an account of the hope that is ours in Christ.

The church, in other words, is to be a hopeful community, not a delusional community. We have our delusions, of course generally arising from our sense of our own importance, from our belief in our self-sufficiency, or moral superiority. In today's gospel reading Jesus tells us to be perfect, he doesn't tell us that we are perfect. Indeed, as we've been reflecting on recent Sundays, Matthew 5 offers us clear evidence of where we fall short. Murder is wrong, but so is anger, adultery is wrong, but so is inward lust. Love your neighbour, yes, but love your enemy also, for that's what God does. and just as his listeners squirm in shame, Jesus delivers the punchline. 'Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

In the Greek, the word for perfect (*teleios*) is closely related to the word Jesus uses in St John's gospel when, on the cross he exclaims, 'It is finished.' (*tetelestai*) Finished, not just ended, but finished off, completed, perfected. As in 'the finished article.' The work that was in progress in Jesus' life is completed on the cross. Perhaps, then, we might see ourselves too as works in progress, and live in hopeful humility that one day we shall be the finished article. That though we clearly are imperfect, yet even in this life, perhaps especially in this life, God's grace is transforming us. That we can be a hopeful for those who suffer most, and through our recognition that peace, the peace that Christ wills, comes not through seeking vengeance or harbouring hatred, but by loving our enemy and praying for those who would do us wrong.

It's asking a lot of us, for we are a people not yet perfect But, by God's grace, we are a work in progress.

Lent Appeal

I know there are many, many demands on our generosity just now. The earthquake in Syria and Turkey has been horrendous in its consequences. But I try to focus in our Lent Appeals on supporting

ongoing causes that may not be emotive but in which our giving may be transformative. This year's appeal for the water filtration project at St Nicholas' Seminary in Cape Coast, Ghana, comes to us in large part because of the opportunity for me to renew friendships at the Lambeth Conference. Theological education and ministerial training are vital for the continued health of our Province just as they are for the church across the world. But whereas we have the resources to pay for this, in many provinces' income is erratic and unpredictable a consequently, training is frequently interrupted. In this project we have the opportunity to make a real difference. Clean water will be one outcome, and a source of regular income to sustain the life of the seminary and support the next generation of Anglican leaders in West Africa, will be another. Cape Coast is our partner diocese, our partnership is built on friendship not on money, but I am constantly aware that comparatively modest amounts of money from our perspective may be life-changing in part of Africa. And the great thing here is that our money will be an investment in the well-being of our Ghanaian brothers and sisters that will go on giving long after Lent 2023 has ended.