

Edinburgh Diocesan Synod – February 25th, 2023

‘I’m not optimistic, but I’m hopeful.’ I often hear people of faith 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

community not just because of life after death but life before death. That the account we are to give of the hope that is in us, is authenticated, validated not by learned treatises or convincing arguments but by who we are and by the life we live, individually and corporately.

This hope, born of humility and trust in God, is one of the most precious gifts we have to offer. Others rightly expect to see *love* embodied in the church, but they are also entitled to look to us to see *hope* made real. It's hope that means we don't give up on life, we don't give up on the vision of a better world. It's hope that compels us to build partnerships with others and to reach outwards towards a greater solidarity that transcends the bounds of church, nation and even species, to include all living things.

There's plenty in today's synod meeting that speaks of this hopeful humility. Even our deliberations over Canon 4 imply a church prepared to work hard at discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit amongst us. The Pastoral Offices engage us in the work of healing. Our money will be used not just to sustain the present but to invest in the future, especially in areas where other denominations are having to draw back. Above all, our commitment to take radical action to move closer to Net Zero and to face the climate crisis head on is about our sense of belonging to the earth God has given us and our desire to honour God in all creation.

All this, in the wider context of our congregations reaching out in service to others, through offering a warm hub, food banks, debt counselling and the like, as well as engaging politically, pressing for a society that cares for its weakest members. In the context too of a war in Europe now one year on. We all know well the impact of the Ukraine war on so many millions of people. Even when it does end there will be, I'm sure, a long shadow. Are we optimistic about this? Perhaps not. But we remain hopeful, and we express our hope through the hospitality we offer, through the passion of our support

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 and, 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 parts 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.

Please give generously. I would so love for us to raise the £12k needed so that work can begin as soon as possible.

Honorary Lay Canon

The Cathedral Chapter would like to nominate to Synod a new Honorary Lay Canon. Janet McKinnell has been Warden of Lay Readers in the Diocese during my time as bishop and for several years before that. Throughout this period Janet has been meticulous in her care for our Lay Readers and in raising the profile of their ministry in the diocese. She helped establish a discernment process which is now Province-wide, she has accompanied our trainees through the Episcopal Institute, and provided welcome and induction for those newly arrived from other provinces. She plans our annual Lay Reader day and has been central to the organising of Provincial conferences. The Chapter feel that this loving service should be recognized and we would invite you to indicate your support for our nomination that Janet should be installed as an Honorary Lay Canon of St Mary's Cathedral.