

## **Enthronement Sermon**

Hello. Thirty four years ago I was ordained on the very spot from where I have just been presented to you as your bishop. And in just thirteen days time, I will ordain new deacons and priests, a first for them, and a first for me. I wonder if any of them will become the Bishop of Salisbury. Who knows? Well God does, and his grace and love has been, is now, and will be -sufficient for us all as we seek his Kingdom here and now.

Every new Vicar at their Induction has to give the notices so I will be no different. Thank you for coming, and thank you for making this a special occasion when the diocese comes together for the first time in over two years. Thank you to those of you sharing in this moment via the live stream. Now, immediately that this service ends, you have something to do. We want to capture an image of the diocese coming together, so after the blessing if I make it that far, we want everyone and that means everyone including you Dad, to move as swiftly as possible to gather outside for a photo, for The Big Picture as we are calling it. No straight lines, no pecking order with clergy or bishops, just a great big family photo outside this amazing cathedral of ours. Children in the

front, and those of you at watching at home can take a selfie and send it in. The Dean has been practicing with his megaphone and he will put us in good order, however higgledy-piggledy that is. Photographers will be high up on a platform lift. And just in case there is any doubt, yes this is classified as a party and you are allowed to smile. Only after the Big Picture do you get your fizz and your ice creams. Let's make this the image of a confident church.

Thank you ahead of that and thank you to all those who have lived this episcopal vacancy so well. Thank you Bishop Andrew, for being sponsoring bishop and caring for all those to be ordained soon. Thank you especially to Archbishop Ezekiel for coming just for this service from our beloved Sudan. Thank you, Your Grace and please take our love and respect back with you. And one last thank you, to someone who has led you during this period in quite an extraordinary way for which the people of this diocese will always be grateful. Thank you Bishop Karen.....

Actually, she's done it rather too well so I'm feeling the pressure. The words of the first reading sum all this up:

‘Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.’

And to go on from the start of that reading, ‘Now concerning the times and the seasons.....’ these are difficult times. We’ve been living through a difficult season. My ministry as your bishop will always be in the context of the post-Covid era, the post-Covid church. So much has changed, and so much is uncertain. It makes us anxious, and we have become an anxious society, and we are an anxious church. Anxiety makes us tetchy, it keeps us awake at night and it makes us doubt ourselves and everyone else. And yet, and yet, we are still here. This place will always be known as the cathedral that became the vaccination centre; our churches that were closed went on-line and worship is now available to all in new ways. Our schools are thriving, and our chaplaincies alongside soldier and patient alike. And across the diocese, and soon with the Channel Islands, priests and people are following Christ in their parishes and worshipping communities and making a difference. The Kingdom is already here, here and now.

As that Gospel reading reminds us, we have the talent. We have Jesus our Lord and Saviour – he is our confidence. What we need to do is recognise that we can make a difference, that we all share the responsibility for growing disciples, and we all need to be confident in our faith. We will not always agree with each other, even the twelve apostles argued regularly, but we can disagree well, and we can stick together because that's what Jesus wanted when he prayed that they might all be one. We have the talent of Jesus Christ among us.

Of course, the temptation when the new vicar arrives is to sit back and hand it all over to her or him to sort out. The same is true with a new bishop. There you are Bishop Stephen, there's the deficit, there's the need for re-organisation, there's the worry around decline, over to you. In my time in this wonderful diocese, there will be no 'over to you', there will be no othering, there will be no them over there, there will only be us, the body of Christ in this place. Each one of us, working together, to bring in the Kingdom – here and now. It is a little known statistic that if just one person out of every fifty people in our churches, brought one other person

to faith each year, the Church of England would be in numerical growth. Only twenty of you here, need to make one more Christian a year, for this diocese to be in numerical growth.

So let's do this. We can do this. If it can't be done in Salisbury Diocese, it can't be done. Well it can be done, and it starts now. Children, you know what your job is, please take an envelope to everyone here now. Off you go!

Coming round to you is an envelope for everyone. Please take one but don't open it yet. Thank you John.

Now, I wonder whose got the golden ticket? I'm about to tell you what to do with the contents of your envelope. Please open it now.

So it seems everyone has got the golden ticket! This is your talent, ten talents just for you. There are a thousand people here, and there are a thousand envelopes. Ten thousand pounds generously donated by two anonymous benefactors – thank you – you know who you are – given in generosity to help bring in the Kingdom here and now.

You now bear the responsibility for this gift. This is your talent which is entrusted to you. What will you do with it? Will you bury it in case the Archdeacon comes calling? Will you save it, waiting for the next rainy day. Or will you make it grow so that good can come from this? This is not about money. This is about what you are going to do with this talent which Jesus is sharing with you. Perhaps buy a meal for someone who is making the choice between heat and to eat. Perhaps support your local foodbank, or give it to the latest fundraising project in your parish. Buy tiles for the church roof, take someone lonely out for a drink to spend quality time with them and tell them why Jesus loves them too; gift aid it at least, and perhaps donate it to the Sudan Medical Link; club together with others here today and start a Messy Church, the possibilities are endless – especially for Christians and a church with confidence. You hold in your hand the power to change the world, pound by pound. Salisburys got talent.

You see it is all about us, the Diocese of Salisbury made up of all your Christ-like talents. Only we can make the church grow, only we can save what we know is great, only we all

together, working together as one body can embody what you asked for in a new bishop – to be Holy, Visionary, Transforming, Courageous, Unifying, Visible and Caring. This is my vocation and this is our vocation.

We can do this. This is our time. This is our talent. This is his Kingdom – here and now. Amen.

