

2020 29th February Presidential Address

Micah 6.6-8; Mark 12.28-34

We meet near the beginning of Lent which is a time of self-examination and repentance. By prayer, fasting and self-denial and by reading and meditating on God's holy word we are called to rediscover for ourselves the disciplines of Christian living as we prepare to celebrate Easter. Lent is less about what we take on or give up but about being alert to the presence of God who in Jesus Christ has come very near to us. As St Augustine said, "We come to God not by navigation but by love".

On the other hand, there is a very close link between who we are and what we do. What does the Lord require of us but to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly? In the Gospels, the law is summarised: love God and love your neighbour as yourself. Neighbour is defined broadly. Everyone is in; including the planet.

#Lent Care for God's Creation

General Synod met between storms Ciera and Dennis. We meet with storm Jorge ('hoor hay'). More extreme weather events are very much connected with climate change. At our last meeting we recognised there is a climate emergency. General Synod has asked for a plan for the Church of England to be Net Zero by 2030 with reviews every 3 years at both General Synod and Diocesan Synod. It looks a tall order but the aim is for us to move faster in response to danger. We have our diocesan environmental plan and work has begun nationally to see what is needed to aim for Net Zero by 2030.

By and large we are not motivated so much by fear as by love. At Poole and North Bournemouth Deanery Synod on Tuesday night, Lydia Reese from A'Rocha suggested that we should enjoy, nurture and defend the environment out of love. It was a welcome vision. She also quoted Gus Speth, a scientist who used to be the Director of the National Research Defence Council in the US, who said:

I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, eco system collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy – and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation – and we scientists don't know how to do that.

Spirituality and morality are very much the business of Christians, of the Church and of all faith communities; and for Anglicans to care for God's creation it's one of the marks of mission. #LiveLent Care for God's Creation is proving to be a very successful Lent theme for the Church of England and this diocese. It has something for everyone, individually and together and it speaks beyond the Church of the gift of God's good creation.

I was pleased General Synod also agreed to the transfer of the oversight of the Church of England in the Channel Islands to the Diocese of Salisbury. The Archdeacon of Sarum will report on this later but, of course, now the work begins.

Changes at Church House

There have been some significant changes at Church House with the creation of four teams from the previous 15 small teams. The new structure begins tomorrow, 1st March. The aim is to make a more coherent, better integrated and more effective Church House. A new leadership team is emerging. Liz Ashmead has been appointed to the role of Director of Finance and Asset Management (including Property). Elizabeth Harvey has been appointed to the role of Director of Parish Support, Governance and Administration.

As part of these significant changes, Judith Wilson and Canon Jane Charman are both moving on from their former roles. Jane finished as Director of Ministry on February 14th, a post she has held with distinction for 16 years. She has made an immense contribution to the life and work of the diocese and I thank Jane for her very considerable contributions. We hope she will continue to represent the Diocese on General Synod through to the end of this triennium in July but that depends on the clergy on Bishop's Council giving their approval. I am sure they will.

Judith Wilson will finish as Director of HR at the end of April. Hers has been a less visible role but a vital one. At a time of considerable change in the Church of England Judith has been a very reliable guide and I thank her for her service.

Jonathan Triffitt will be starting next week as interim Director of Mission and Ministry and Deputy Diocesan Secretary. Jonathan will step back from an active role as Chair of the House of Clergy for the 6 months of this interim appointment to prevent any conflict of interest – starting tomorrow! I am grateful to Jonathan's Church Wardens for releasing him from his Benefice responsibilities in Blandford Forum and Langton Long for this period though he will continue to spend one day per week as part of the parish team.

Diocesan Priorities

At our last Synod we got into a bit of a muddle with the refreshing of our diocesan priorities. Step back.

When we agreed Renewing Hope – Pray, Serve, Grow we thought it would serve as a focus for the diocese for 10 years or so and that a review would be needed after 5 years. We recognised that God gives the growth but if the numbers didn't turn round there would be a growing financial gap that would not be sustainable. We did that

review last year, checking back with Synod and other bodies to develop the clear proposal before us with linkage to the background papers.

For many, Renewing Hope has done what it said. It continues to provide the main framework for us. Pray and Serve are things the diocese has been doing well. There has also been Growth as defined in terms of energy within the mixed economy of inherited models of traditional Church and a variety of new forms. But the Fair Share numbers are still a problem and in the end the finances have to be sustainable. If you go on doing the same thing you keep on getting the same results so something new is needed. The emphases on discipleship and evangelism, on developing more dynamic and collaborative leadership and on the Gospel transforming lives and communities looks a good and careful development within the overall framework of Renewing Hope – Pray, Serve, Grow.

As we noted last time, this has to go alongside a financial framework. We've got a 5 years framework which sketches some possible futures. We said we would stick with using the Fair Share Count as a way of monitoring progress. There is a strong commitment to Fair Share in the diocese and an excellent contribution rate but there are also some things that need to be addressed. A system that has been used for such a long time is difficult to change, as we are finding in response to the review group chaired by Rosemary Cook.

Independently of that, as a measure of our Church activity and growth or decline, the Fair Share number does not serve us well. Church life is so much more varied with schools and mid-week services and events and some Friends organisations that contribute to the fabric costs. It isn't just the Sunday church congregation that see themselves as part of the local church. What and how we count and who contributes the funds is a perplexing problem in our trying to describe God's small miracle that is the Diocese of Salisbury.

The bishops, Diocesan Secretary and Archdeacons are making plans to tour the diocese to set out the challenges. As a parish priest I became convinced that money is at root a faith question. How we spend our money reflects what we believe.

A task without a vision is a drudge

A vision without a task is an illusion.

A vision and a task is the hope of the world.

If we rise to the vision the 5 year financial framework will look very different and make all sorts on ministry and mission possible. It will set the direction of travel for the next phase.

And finally

I love it that various people in the Diocese write books. Not just Julian Fellowes of Downton Abbey and Michael Dobbs of House of Cards. There's been a little crop recently from clergy including Jonathan Herbert and Clark Berge both of whom live at Hilfield Friary. I was reading Br Clark's *Running to Resurrection* (Canterbury Press, 2019) on the way back from Exeter last Saturday. It is a very engaging account of his life and struggles with addictions and honesty and of the discipline and joys of running. He writes,

Thank God I took the chance [of running], or I'd never have known the fulfilment and happiness I have in my life. This is the victory of faith. Christ came not to take away our struggle but to be with us in it.

I got home to the news about Jean Vanier, the founder of the L'Arche community, who we now know had abused at least six women, some of them nuns. I met Vanier a few times. He was a remarkable man, always seemed so perfect a model of beautiful, vulnerable leadership. But what I discovered when I was in my mid-twenties and setting out in ordained ministry is that the priests I admire most were those with feet of clay, who were transparent and honest and flawed but were willing to keep on going out of determination and a faith in God who is bigger and greater than ourselves. They lacked pretence. They were real. They faced their inner demons, like Jacob wrestling with God to the break of day. In this process we are both wounded *and* blessed.

Since becoming bishop I have enjoyed Rob Key's description of "the happy Diocese of Salisbury", which he said whenever he spoke at General Synod. I hope it's still deeply true for else we won't be able to do anything together for God. Br Clark Berge knows this: reality is to be preferred to appearances.

After Synod today I am going to the farewell of Andrew Wood and welcome of Andrew De Ville as Chairman of the Methodist Church Southampton District. A friend who is now an Anglican received a Bible at his Methodist ordination in which there was written by the then President of the Methodist Conference:

Study this world.

Sense its needs.

Speak to its condition.

That's the task for us as a Church with the Scriptures and the blessing of each other in Christ. As a Synod we need to do it honestly and well – do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God. The disciplines of Lent and the courtesies of Christian life will help us to have a fruitful day. "You are not far from the kingdom of God."