

## **Living in Love and Faith presentation – Diocesan Synod – 22nd June 2021**

**The Ven Alan Jeans Archdeacon of Sarum**

In the garden of Gethsemane, before Jesus went to the cross, his mind was not on the rejection and suffering he was about to face; but rather on how his disciples were going to survive after his departure. He wanted them to be 'in the world', but not 'of the world'.

He prayed two things for them: that they would be united as one, and that they would be sanctified in the truth.

First is a prayer for unity. 'Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name... so that they may be one as we are one'. 'May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me'. The unity amongst believers mirrors the unity between Jesus and God the Father, and will draw people to the truth of the gospel message.

Second is a prayer for truth. 'Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth'. Jesus was asking God the Father to make his followers holy or 'saint-like' through the truth.

I think that when Christians disagree, and fight their battles in public, the whole Body of Christ weeps, just as Christ wept over the city of Jerusalem. Those who look upon our disagreements can rightly say, "See how those Christians love one another!"

In recent years, in my time as a member of the General Synod, we have learned to explore what it means to disagree well. Our public battles over issues in human sexuality, and the ordination of women to all three Holy Orders, amongst other issues, caused great pain to our Church, and to our service to this nation. Following those debates, we learned much by sitting down together over each meeting of the Synod, we listened to each other, in groups that intentionally brought us face to face with those who held different opinions. We learned to respect each other, to listen graciously, and above all, to discern God's will for his Church.

Those lessons now form the core of the Living in Love and Faith material. We all have to understand that, for the sake of the Good News of Jesus Christ, and the love of God, our Church must be better at looking at what divides us, in a way that will fulfil Jesus' prayer that we might be united and sanctified as his Body in the world.

I'm assuming you have all read the paper – Living in Love and Faith on our agenda. The LLF material offers us resources to learn together. The Pastoral Principles course identifies six 'pervading evils': prejudice, silence, ignorance, fear, hypocrisy and power. These 'evils' hinder our personal growth as Christians, hurt other people, and create barriers that stop our churches from growing into Christian communities of welcome and belonging.

The LLF materials challenge all of us to admit our hypocrisy, cast out our fear, address our ignorance, acknowledge our prejudice, speak into silence, and pay attention to inequalities of power.

There are a variety of media to use, to suit the local context. There is the opportunity to feed back what learning you have valued and been challenged by, so our National Church can assess our thoughts and responses. Do please let me know if I can support you, and I'd value hearing back from your use of the material, and how you might follow up the courses. In our Diocese, I'm pleased to be working with Bishop Karen, who is a member of the National Group coordinating the next steps.

Disagreement between Christians is normal. The New Testament is full of it and as Christ's followers we should actually expect it. Dealing with our disagreements requires maturity and skill. We will all make many mistakes because none of us is perfect, and God has much work still to do with all of us. But when Christians work out their disagreements in a godly way, it is a wonderful testimony to the truth of the gospel, and as a result many more people will be drawn to Jesus Christ.

Thank you, and I'm happy to take a few comments or questions.