

15 September 2021

Synod Address

Welcome here this evening and to this Synod.

Thank you, for your willingness to be part of the work of the Diocese in this way and I look forward to working with you as we learn from one another and share and plan together as to how we can best serve our churches, our schools and our communities with the resources God has given us.

Thank you too for all you have already done these last few years to ensure that as Christians we have continued to renew hope in the places we find ourselves. These have been unprecedented times for the church, and I and others have been very aware of the hard work, the adjustments and the care that has gone on locally to enable our worship to continue and our churches to be important parts of community life.

It has been quite amazing to see, not just the dedication but the creativity everywhere from Marlborough to Lyme Regis, Alderholt to Westbury and everywhere in between. Thank you. It is good to bring all of this together again, as Diocesan representatives and as Christians around the Lord's table, and as we share in this Eucharist today let us, through our prayers and worship, bring all that has past, mindful of the encouragements, but also the sorrow and loss that is there, seek God in the present and commit ourselves to working together for a better future, asking God to continue to help us pray, serve and grow.

Presidential Address

Taken, blessed, broken and shared. These are the significant actions in our Eucharist lived out week by week in our churches. The symbolism is rich, as the one saving act of Christ upon the cross is recalled in our liturgy, transforming the ordinary into something extra-ordinary for the life of our world.

Taken, blessed, broken and shared. Four separate acts which when brought together enable humanity and divinity to collide, making the impossible possible and something beyond words to happen.

As we meet at the start of our Generous Giving month, I want us therefore to think for a moment about those actions, and how they relate to our own lives as Christians and the life of the Diocese.

It all begins with offering up, following in the footsteps of Christ himself, and being taken and used by God. So, in the Eucharist all is offered up, bread and wine, our financial contributions and ourselves to be used in God's service. This offering up is illustrated throughout scripture, from the burnt offerings in the temple, to the best of the harvest, from the little lad's packed lunch to the widow's mite, from the finest jewels for the temple to the tax collector's ill-gotten gains.

Our New Testament reading reminds us tonight that we all have something to bring because we already have been given gifts by God. It's sometimes just our own reluctance, or reticence or self-reliance which stops us from freely offering what we have to be taken by God.

May we be a Diocese of brave disciples, willing to not hold anything back.

We all bring something to the life of this Synod, and in a way as we gather tonight, we can offer that up to be used by God, freely and unconditionally. We come just as we are, aware of our weakness as well as our strengths, and by his word God receives what we offer.

That means that all of us have a part to play in the work of the Diocese as Synod members, as active participants bearing witness to what God is doing across the Diocese where you go back too, as well as bringing what God is doing locally as we gather together. And together God takes us for this time, and for God's purposes to work through this body. It's going to be a challenging time, as we work together to solve some of the current problems we face about finance, and deployment, about good stewardship and as we pray together for a new Diocesan bishop. Offering ourselves is also about encouragement as we share what God is doing in our midst, together and apart and have our faith restored and increased hearing faith stories from other parts of the Diocese.

That's when the blessing happens. Once we come offering what we have, and for some it will be less than others, if we come openly and honestly, then God promises to take it and bless it.

Nothing passes God by, and as we read in the Bible about the rejoicing of one sinner that repents, or the rescue of the lost sheep so often the blessing brings far more than the offering itself. Many here can testify to the blessings which have come, following the willingness to come to Christ and say, 'here I am, take what I offer.'

And the great thing for us is that God's blessing can happen in the most unlikely places and in ways which can surprise and shock. So often have I seen generosity being honoured and blessing come down in return. That saying 'It is more blessed to give than receive.' is so true.

And God wants us to be a blessing, this Synod to be a blessing, across the Diocese as we join in with what God is doing. As our praying, our serving, our growing generates more prayer and service and growth, and others are brought into the abundant life which God offers.

May we be a Diocese of humble disciples, willing to be blessed and to bless others.

Now to the hard and challenge bit. As we follow the footsteps of Christ, we as our reading for this evening, and that from last Sunday reminds us, are called to take up our cross. For Christ that literally meant death, as we recall in this Eucharist, the brokenness of one became the salvation of all.

St Paul writes about being hard-pressed and crushed, and I know that there will be people here who would also testify to going through tough times, the valley of the shadow of death, the feelings of being spent as we have kept going, the cost of following Christ. And as olives, and lemons and other fruits have to be beaten from the tree, crushed and pressed in order for the goodness to flow, so it can be for us too.

Often in church life it isn't until we look around and see significantly fewer people in attendance that we begin to ask questions about outreach and mission, or it isn't until we cannot pay our bills or parish share that we begin to ask questions about giving or until we feel squeezed that we consider our own work-life balance. That's because it is not until we feel at a loss, we feel helpless that we allow God to come in and meet with us. It is often when we get to our wits' end that we fall on our knees and pray.

I am not saying that God wants to break us, it is about us being prepared to be broken in order for God to work in and through us. To give and not count the cost, to offer to walk the second mile for the sake of another, to give away our best and not the leftovers.

May we be a Diocese of courageous disciples willing to make sacrifices and give away to others.

And then the transformation can begin, the miracles can take place.

Our God is a God of abundance, we all have enough and yet when we come, and allow God to take, bless and break, so often what happens is beyond our wildest dreams. God who created the universe, recreates abundance in and through you and me. Week by week, we take that for granted as bread and wine, offered and shared, work through us as Christ's people as we go and serve the Lord. What potential there is in us therefore, tonight as God's people, as we go from this meeting. What potential there is in our churches, our communities for God's transformation if we are willing to share.

May we be a Diocese of generous disciples known for our extravagant giving and care.

Taken, blessed, broken and shared. Four simple but profound words which have since time began changed the world and will, if we are willing to join in, continue to do so.

Thank you for the part you have already agreed to play. There may be hard choices ahead of us, however with faith and trust in Christ who gave himself up for all, in the power of the Spirit in our world today, and in the one who transforms it all, by continually taking, blessing, breaking and sharing, we can be sure that we will have all we need for the future.

Amen