

Synod Presidential Address

The first thing I wish to say this morning is 'Thank You'. Thank you for finding time to come today, thank you for working so hard as we find our way as a church and as churches across the diocese in these uncertain times. Thank you for engaging with the questions of finance since we aired them at our last meeting. Thank you for praying for the process of appointment of our next Bishop and for your support of me as I stand in the Acting role. Thank you to St Paul's for having us today. Thank you to St Mark's Church, here in Salisbury for offering space to those caught up in the train accident a week ago, thank you to all those who stood for General Synod and congratulations to all those who have been elected.

Those who are tuned into social media or read your Grapevine will know that I have just returned with 43 pilgrims from a trip to Iona. It was a great trip, not only to immerse ourselves in the worshipping life of an Abbey on a beautiful Scottish Island but to experience more of the evangelistic zeal with which the Celtic Christians went from there to evangelise most of pagan England.

St Columba and his 12 companions setting sail from Ireland in 563 established a monastery which became one of the greatest missionary centres of the Celtic Church. In fact, we probably would not be here today if it was not for him and Augustine and their missionary zeal. We would not have our structures, and synods, our bishops, our dioceses and be divided into parishes maybe all a mixed blessing, but one that sets today into context and ourselves in that great commission which Jesus laid on Columba's heart and those of other Celtic and Roman Christians.

They have much to teach us so at the start of this Synod, in All Saints tide, with important matters of mission and ministry laying ahead of us, I want us to look briefly at where those Celtic roots of our faith can re-establish themselves in our common life.

An important word for us is rhythm. The spiritual life of the monastery and of the Celtic Saints gave time for work, worship, and witness in equal measure. The chapel and church, regular prayer and worship was at the heart of all they did and around which everything else flowed. Our own prayer and worship, and that of our local churches, and that of our local

schools matters. We are going to hear later about the life of our Cathedral, and it is good for us to recognise that daily cycle of prayer which goes on in that building which sustains many but also the life of the diocese.

So, whatever plans we make, individual time for prayer and worship is vital as we come before God in recognition of our own need and weakness and God's power and resource, bringing thanks and praise, and in turn being equipped to live the Christian life. Worship is the heartbeat which keeps us going. It's interesting that Psalm 145, a psalm of praise can be found in the middle of the Bible. Maybe the fact that it is at the centre of the Bible is because praise should be in the centre of our lives? Reminding us that it is God's world and church and not ours.

And alongside worship for the Celtic Christians was a commitment to work and witness. Those who have paid employment will know that is an essential part of your life.

For clergy maybe the Celtic scriptorium was their equivalent of the modern-day study with its computer screen. And whilst I know most lay people here would like to see clergy out and about most of the time, you need to understand the reality that is today God's work is also being done inside, in meetings, in dealing with emails and preparing services, in private study, putting together teaching materials and dealing with funeral directors, stone masons and wedding preparation. These are also tasks of the parish priest, whose calling is to be prepared within and without.

And the third commitment of the Celtic Christians was to witness. They were a people constantly on the move, as evangelists and church planters. Holding lightly to their resources, travelling through. Taking the good news of Jesus to the people and to kings and princes as they moved from Scotland down through England.

It seems a long time ago now when Synod, following on from the review of 'Renewing Hope' by Bishop John Gladwin, set three priorities. These are shaping our work as we go forward:

Discipleship and Evangelism

Dynamic Collaboration

Community Transformation

Two of these are about our witness. Telling the story of our faith and bringing change and transformation as we go. We are going to hear today two stories amongst many. Bringing a balance to Synod which could all be about business and budgets, we shall be hearing the story of the development of Community hubs, as churches, communities and schools come together to transform and address areas of need emotionally and materially, and we are going to hear something of the story of Chaplaincy in our diocese. A role that continues that call to go out into places outside the church to be the holy person there, to share the Christian story there as prophets and pioneers.

Worship, work, and witness.

The Celtic Church can also teach us about Collaboration and Contemplation. There's was a largely non-hierarchical church, as leader and led worked together for the common good.

Our third priority as a diocese is Dynamic Collaboration

Discipleship and Evangelism

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That means collaboration which makes a difference - between clergy and lay, between churches, within deaneries, within diocesan departments, with other partners. I hope too today we can demonstrate real collaboration as all of us seek to support one another in the work that God has called us.

Contemplation however is also essential. We are all tired beings after an exhausting nearly two years. Time out, time away, time in prayer for all of us helps us focus where we should be putting our energy. And help maybe required to enable those with responsibilities to take that time. We all need engagement, and we all need retreat.

And for busy churches, stepping away to decide priorities is also important. The leaders of the early Celtic church would leave their busy monastery for a retreat down the river. It sounds idyllic but enabled them to go back to the monastery with renewed vision and energy.

The early Celtic Church developed an ecology. Part of their life rhythm was the rhythm of nature and God's creation. There was a seamless understanding that God who created all things was in all things and therefore God's earth needed to be treated with reverence and respect. The daily chores, the rising sun, the parched earth were all part of their gratitude in worship and the land and the elements all were part of their stewardship.

We meet today in the middle of COP26 in Glasgow, our response to God's earth is key and it has been good to see some of our clergy there in Glasgow where other faith leaders also have been meeting to remind those there that we are talking about God's earth, God's planet and we all have a responsibility to care for that. Standing firm as Holy people in a prophetic way on behalf of us all. How is God calling each church here, each Christian here to respond to global warming, environmental pollution, our own carbon footprint?

And finally, as we reflect on how the Celtic Church grew, we see that the vision drove their mission through commitment and support. Whilst enjoying the benefits of patronage and endowments of kings and princes who we must remember were converted to Christianity on the way, the church only grew and expanded through the commitment of those who gave land and money to found churches and monasteries, those who sponsored the development of illuminated books, so God's story could be shared, those who gave towards the hospitality of strangers. It only grew because people believed in what they and others were doing in sharing the good news. It gives us a glorious picture of people that were committed to go, into dark places to bring light, unaware places to bring revelation, and to awaken that Celtic pagan interest in the spiritual with the good news of Jesus Christ. So that everyone living in these lands has the opportunity to gather as Christian people, and to receive the care of the church.

That is where we are today, and in some ways the Mission is as hard as people no longer know that story, so we have to start again. But if we believe in God's vision for us, to continue to be the church in every place, to offer the care of the church for all, to go and tell, as leaders and led, the real challenge facing us is our funding. The budget conversation today should not be about how many stipendiary clergy do we really need, or how can we cut our cloth to do the minimum because it will cost us less. Our conversation should be about our commitment to Christ's vision for his church and on our mission to share the love of Christ with those who do not know it, knowing we have the best news of all.

It's interesting that we already have partners who work with us because they support the vision and the mission. You will be hearing from Ruth Wells later on and the Talbot Village Trust believe in the impact of Anglican Chaplaincy so much that they fund her post at the university.

The challenge is do we believe in what we are doing enough ourselves? Approving the budget, for it is the best budget we can offer, without withdrawing significantly from our mission, commits each benefice, each Christian, each church to doing all it can to support the vision, to bring transformation to our communities and we are all ambassadors of that. We don't just want to do what we are currently doing, I am sure God wants us to do much more, whether it be within our own small piece of the kingdom or elsewhere in the diocese. Our response to the call, is key and the challenge is now. Liz Ashmead shared with Bishop's Council on Thursday that we need good responses to Share payments in November and December to not disrupt our plans, so please in these next few months see how much your church can do to contribute to your share in full. It may only take one extra push, or a few additional financial gifts, but for the sake of our vision, God's mission, do try.

So my challenge to you, from this little foray into Celtic Spirituality and at the beginning of this Synod, let's enjoy the rhythms of life which God has set before us, let's together work, worship and witness, let's collaborate and contemplate and be committed to treading gently on God's earth and let us be committed through our giving and our going in mission to the people of this diocese, and share the good news of God's love. Creating as we go catalysts for mission – schools, churches, cathedral and within communities, properly funded and resourced. Let us be Christ's people.

Remembering he said: Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.
Amen