Diocesan Synod, Saturday 27 April 2019

Bishop’s Address

In my address to this Synod I want to reflect on the life and mission of the diocese in terms of ‘Tipping Points and Pivotal Moments’. Part of the responsibility of those who share leadership in any organisation is to discern what season we are presently in: is this a season of growth or decline, stability or change, season of heightened threat or increased opportunity.

In my experience those pairs nearly always go together: where the Spirit is at work some things will be growing while other things are declining, a measure of stability is vital to sustain essential change, and the only sustained threat to an organisation is when opportunities are missed or ignored.

I believe we are at a ‘tipping point’ as a diocese moving through a season of growth spiritually and numerically that will, over the next five years, continue to revitalize the ministry of the church in every part of the diocese and by God’s grace lead to overall numerical growth.

I do not think what Archbishop Justin said at a conference in 2016 was simply vague and well-meaning optimism when he spoke about ‘a new springtime’ in the Church of England. What has been happening since then in the national church and in our diocese unquestionably bears this out.
But before I go any further I want to remind us of the scale of our vision – a photo of our world from space! We are part of a world-wide Church: the Holy Spirit sees no borders and boundaries when it comes to our primary identity as Christian people. We are citizens of heaven, co-workers with Christ as his body on earth. We share a mission that belongs not to us but to God – ‘for God so loved the world’.

Our partnerships across the world are vitally important to our spiritual health. Whatever present challenges or opportunities we face, we are part of a world-church where the kingdom of God is expanding more quickly than we are often aware as our vision is constrained by western eyes.

Over the next year I want us to review our global links in preparation for Lambeth 2020 and, where it is not yet the case, for every church to develop a meaningful relationship with a church overseas.

When it comes to the transforming mission of God in this diocese, I am greatly encouraged by what the Lord is doing among us and through us. We have a clear strategic framework and bold aspirations for further growth. I can confidently report that people are becoming followers of Christ in every part of the diocese, new worshipping communities are being established, larger and smaller churches are embracing a vision to be ‘resourcing churches’ (growing to give themselves away), younger and newer
leaders are being inspired, equipped and commissioned, and there is an increasing sense that we are co-partners in one glorious mission not competitors in a shrinking market.

In terms of our spiritual and numerical growth we are at a tipping point which I believe will be the case over the next 3-5 years. We must hold our nerve and continually renew our confidence in God, so that we will make the most of the pivotal moments that always advance the gospel. We must also renew our commitment to resource our present levels of ministry through the Parish Share even as we are thankful for the funding for new opportunities for mission coming from the Church Commissioners (‘Strategic Development Funding’).


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The consequence of following the leading of the Holy Spirit in mission will always mean Radical Change – this has been the case for the Church from Pentecost to today. I am not thinking primarily about issues relating to the church’s engagement with shifts in the society it is seeking to reach, so much as the shape and character of its ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit.
The radical change should begin in our lives as disciples of Christ as we daily learn what it means to live with Jesus, live like Jesus and live for Jesus.

*Radical Change requires Radical Holy Love* and that is the central challenge of Christian discipleship as it is taught by the apostle Peter in his first epistle. This will be the focus biblical text for the Lambeth Conference 2020.

For now I simply draw your attention to these verses from chapter 4, recognising that in our current national climate of uncertainty and division over Brexit, the Church is called to express radical holy love and hospitality in Jesus’ name.

**Reading 1 Peter 4:7-11**

This brings us back to where we started – the world for which Christ died and rose again. Whatever you may be facing in your life at present I want to thank you for your continued part in the transforming mission of God. I know that many of you carry scars from seeking to join in this mission, taking up your cross daily following Jesus. I therefore close by inviting you to listen to a song I heard for the first time this past week. It reflects on the way God’s good purposes in our lives and his church are most often brought about through times of uncertainty and struggle. We do not lose heart because of the scars that Christ still wears for us, his radical holy love for the world he came to redeem.
Scars by I AM THEY - Trial & Triumph