

INSTALLATION SERMON

Readings:- Ephesians 3.14-21 & Matthew 9.35-38

INTRODUCTION

I was sat in one of the Portland Building (PB) lounges at Nottingham University. I was about to become President of the Christian Union and thinking about my opening words to the CU members. The story of Moses leading the people of Israel out of Egypt had become the focus of my thoughts. Stood at the edge of the Red Sea with the Egyptians coming up fast Moses prayed. The Lord's response was, 'Why are you standing here? Tell the people of God to go forward' (Ex 14.15)

Ever since, in a whole variety of ways, this seems to have been God's call on my life; to lead God's people forward. It is now my enormous honour and privilege to be called to lead the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham forward into the next phase of its history. Like the first bishop of the Diocese, George Ridding, I have made the journey from Winchester to Southwell. Though, unlike him, I do have a house ready to live in.

This is the Diocese in which my call into the Church of England's ordained ministry took place. For 5 years I shared in the life of Christchurch, Chilwell. Little, I suspect, did John Williams, then vicar, David Day, Reader, Graham & Molly Dow, Honorary Curate & first woman Reader or Colin Slater, Churchwarden, suspect in those days in the mid 1970s that this would be part of the story. It is a joy that John & Liz, David & Rosemary, Graham & Molly and Colin Slater are all here to share in this day. I am, I hasten to add, delighted to see every single one of you here today. To all my family, and to all the friends and colleagues from University, Wandsworth, where I served as a curate, Scripture Union, East Ham, Walthamstow, CMS and Winchester Diocese, thank you to all of you, who have played an important part in my life up to now thank you for your support and encouragement over the years, it means an enormous amount to me and thank you for being here today. Then to those of you who are about to share in ministry with me; thank you for being here; I am much looking forward to working alongside, with and for you. Thank you to all those who have organised everything today.

WHAT'S THE VISION?

Now, since the announcement of my appointment was made at the end of June last year one of the most common questions I have been asked is 'What is your vision for the Diocese?' Well the Diocese already has a clear vision laid out in 'Shaping the Future.' This already acts as the diocesan mission template. For those who know it here's a quick reminder; and for those who don't here's a rapid introduction:-

'Discerning God' - for present and future

‘Valuing People’ - locally and globally

‘Serving Community’ - in city and county

‘Enabling Change’ - with mission and ministry

This was also laid out very clearly in the ‘Vacancy in See’ document. When I first read this last March it resonated within me. Here, I found myself thinking and feeling, in a county and city, a diocese and their people with whom, under God, I can work. Rosemary shared in this resonance.

So it is this continuing vision which will shape us together in the coming months and years. Over the next few months as I get out and about across the Diocese I will be seeking to see and understand how this is already being worked out. In November I will take time out to reflect and pray on all I have heard, seen, read and discovered. I expect that flowing from this there will be thoughts, which I will initially share, and test out, with the Bishop’s Staff team, about how this fourfold vision will change and develop, taking fresh shape; by its own definition of ‘enabling change’ it is a vision that must keep developing. The living God whom we serve is always leading us on, calling us forward. The very nature of valuing people and serving communities means that change is an essential part of our life together.

But within this document there was also a Situation Vacant page. Here was a description of the Bishop ‘we need’ and ‘the job to be done’. This too rang lots of bells in me, and Rosemary. It is here there is a vision I want to share today – a vision of the ministry to which you have called me here as bishop. One of my predecessors, Russell Barry, the fifth bishop of the Diocese, wrote, *‘Whatever its theological justification, the real pragmatic argument for episcopacy rests, not on appeal to its record (for on that evidence how can it be defended?) but on the opportunity it provides for a personal initiative and leadership’* (Russell Barry p157)

The Sits Vac stated, ‘Our next bishop will be a leader, teacher, missionary and pastor’.

So let me in the next few minutes outline for you the headlines of the ministry I will seek to exercise amongst you. I draw this vision from the 2 readings we have had today.

OUT & ABOUT

Much of Jesus’ ministry was exercised in the public eye. Matthew gives us this very simple description, ‘Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages’. He was out and about amongst the people of his day from all walks of life, and in every kind of community.

The consecration service for a bishop contains a lot of demanding words; but the phrase that I have found the most awesome is that which says a bishop is ‘to know his people and be known by them.’ (one day ‘know her people’ as well). This was echoed in the Sits Vac by

asking for a bishop who will 'be amongst all the people of the diocese, to know them and be known by them and to love and pastor them'.

It is clear to me that the only way for this to become real is to meet with, listen to, talk with, observe and do things together. So I anticipate being out and about in all the kinds of communities to be found across this county, and within the city. I look forward to meeting all sorts of people from every walk of life, and of all ages. You will find me in the coming months and years in the schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, prisons, work-places, sports arenas and fields, care homes, shops, market-places, farms and other places you might name as well as sometimes church buildings.

TEACHING

Mentioning church buildings, as Jesus travelled one of the things he did was to teach in the synagogues. These were the places where people gathered to worship, to listen to the scriptures being read and explained and to pray. Here Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, opened up the scriptures of his day. He viewed these scriptures as the living word of the Lord which shaped his own understanding of his ministry and which he taught to the people. Teaching was the first of the three main features of Jesus' ministry.

You need to know, in case you hadn't already picked it up that I love the Bible. As George Herbert, who we celebrate today in the church calendar wrote in his first poem entitled 'The Holy Scriptures',

'Oh Book! Infinite sweetness! Let my heart

Suck ev'ry letter, and a hony gain,

Precious for any grief in any part;

To cleare the breast, to mollifie all pain.

Thou art all health, ...'

I love teaching the Bible to people of all ages. This book is transforming when we listen to it, explore it and allow it to shape our thinking and our living. So teaching the Christian faith, through teaching the Bible, will be a high priority in my ministry amongst you. I will seek to do so in churches, schools, and wherever I am invited. The Bible is a closed book to huge numbers of people in our nation today. It is thought to be irrelevant or boring when in fact it is utterly relevant and incredibly exciting. I hope I can help people discover just how exciting the Bible, and, more importantly still, the God of the Bible, is. I expect as I teach that I will learn from you as well as together we engage with the Scriptures. Insights from children and young people into the Bible are particularly powerful. It is essential that there is an open engagement with one another if we are to allow the Bible to shape every part of our lives.

PROCLAIMING

The second aspect of Jesus' ministry was that he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God. The news of God's rule and reign is wonderfully good. It tells us that this world, indeed this universe, belongs first and foremost to its Maker. It tells us that if we work with creation this world can be a wonderful world for us all in which to live.

God's rule is about justice for all. It seeks the well-being of the weakest and the poorest. It cries Justice. In his ministry Jesus turned many things upside down; he honoured and included children, women and the poor in a way which showed his Father's love for all. He welcomed the excluded and the outcast.

He did all of this in the public eye. It brought him into debate and conflict with the existing authorities and powers. The Christian faith is not a private religion, even though our contemporary culture seems to want to try and confine it there. The Christian faith is deeply personal, but it can never, ever be private. It is utterly involved with public concerns like housing and homelessness, employment and worklessness, justice for refugees, education, the well-being of children, crime and safety in our communities. It can never confine itself solely to local or national issues. It has to be concerned for the poorest of the world.

As followers of Jesus we will always seek the common good. So we will work with any and all who long for the same. I therefore look forward greatly to working with local political leaders, local community organisers, charities, leaders of other faiths as well as church leaders of other denominations in the matters that affect the lives of all who live in this county and city and wider nation and world.

I come with a deep love of the church around the world. It has been my enormous privilege to visit many nations and build friendships with church leaders in many lands. It is a particular joy for Rosemary and me that our good friend +Onesphore Rwaje is here from Rwanda representing his own Diocese and the Province of Rwanda. I am delighted to begin my ministry here wearing the robes that come from our link Diocese of Natal and I hope you will give generously today so that our twin Diocese is blessed from today. We will grow and develop our partnership with the church in Natal. We will seek to grow new partnerships with other parts of the world.

The good news is that God is the ruler of all. The good news is that forgiveness, fresh starts and a living relationship with God are available for us all. This is what Jesus proclaimed. It is also what he demonstrated in his ministry of healing.

HEALING

Healing was the third part of Jesus' ministry. But when he healed it was much more than a simple dealing with physical illness. He restored lepers, and others, into society; he crossed racial and ethnic boundaries healing those divides; he comforted the broken-hearted,

brought hope to the hopeless and taught a radically different way of living – loving the enemy, forgiving the debtor, generosity, rejoicing in the wonder of creation. Healing at every level of our being and society. Ultimately his death on the cross was for the deepest healing of us all, and of all creation.

There are many ways in which our communities need healing. We will work with those communities to seek to bring about healing wherever it is needed. Our parish churches should be centres of healing for the communities in which they are set. Our chaplains seeking wholeness in all the places, and amongst all the peoples whom they serve, in prisons and hospitals, colleges, universities and schools, theatres, sports clubs, nightclubs, shops, factories and out on the streets.

Healing of body, mind and spirit are all required. Healing in our communities is a sign of the coming of God's reign in our world. It is the healing that comes from God's love.

FLOWING FROM GOD'S AMAZING LOVE

For all of Jesus' ministry flowed from a life filled and motivated by the love of God for the creation, for himself as Son and for all people. We read that Jesus saw the people who were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd and he had compassion on them. His heart overflowed with love for them. He yearned from his guts for their well-being; for their care, protection and nurture. It was God's love which stirred him, and took him to the Cross.

Paul spells out something more of this love in our first reading. The love which is so high, broad, deep and long that we cannot fathom it, or get beyond it. It is the love seen supremely in the suffering and death of Jesus for us. This is love that surpasses both our knowledge and our understanding. Yet it is the love in which we have been caught up, enfolded and included by God. It is this love which we are called to share.

It is entirely possible to be busy being out and about in communities, teaching, proclaiming and healing yet doing it all from the wrong motives. It has to be God's love which inspires, directs and controls us in all that we do.

CONCLUSION

This overflowing love inevitably sends us out. We cannot hold it in; we cannot keep it to ourselves. It will always reach out to others longing for their wholeness. It will always lead us to encourage others also to be sent out with the same love and the same good news of God's rule.

So here is what I anticipate in leading the diocese. Here are marks by which you can all hold me to account; but also hold ourselves to account:-

Am I /are we out and about in the county and city meeting people face to face in their own communities?

Am I / are we teaching the faith faithfully?

Am I / are we proclaiming the good news of God's way of doing things in the public arena?

Am I / are we seeking to bring God's healing, in all its varied forms, to people, communities and the creation?

Are people being called and sent out to serve in the same way making the good news known?

But above all is God's love being made known and revealed? Am I / are we together demonstrating God's amazing love for the world, revealed in Jesus Christ?

PRAYER

I spent 4 days of this past week in Maison Nicholas Barre, Paris. Nicholas Barre founded the Society of the Infant Jesus in the early 17th century. He was passionate about sharing the faith with children, particularly the children of the poor. This was one of his prayers which I found myself praying time and again, it could be a prayer for yourself too:-

*Choose, Lord, what you want of me.
Order all things, plan and arrange all things in the way that pleases you,
and I will try to make my desires and actions yours,
to follow you in everything and everywhere,
without reserve or limit.
Finally, Lord, I want to belong totally to you,
no more measuring or portioning out,
neither in life nor in death,
in sorrow or in joy, on earth or in heaven.
My beloved is all mine and I am his forever.
O Jesus! O Love!*