

## **WELCOME SERVICES SERMON**

**Joshua 1.1-9 & John 20.19-23**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Thank you for coming to share in this service of welcome. I am delighted to have this, and the service in Worksop next week (Nottingham last week) as a way of worshipping and praying with many who could not be accommodated within the Installation Service. On the postcard you have the headings from the sermon at that service last week (two weeks ago). I made it clear in that sermon that the vision I have for my ministry as bishop is to work in line with the Diocesan vision of Discerning God, Valuing People, Serving Communities and Enabling Change. But what I then sought to do was identify my own priorities within that as being Out and About amongst the communities of the Diocese, Teaching the faith, Proclaiming the good news of God's loving reign, and seeking to bring Healing to people, places and communities. All of this flowing from God's amazing love for his whole creation.

What I want to do in this sermon is explore something further of the kind of leadership I believe I bring, and something of how I believe we are all sustained in our ministries, in all their glorious variety.

### **JOSHUA**

Joshua's story has often cropped up at key points in my ministry and has therefore come to be one on which I reflect often. I have found myself reflecting again over these past weeks in preparing to come to the Diocese as bishop.

Here for me are some of the key connecting points:-

- A) Joshua had a long period of preparation serving as Moses' assistant. During these years he had some extraordinarily powerful experiences of God's presence – just think what it must have been like sharing in the meal with the Lord and the elders recorded in Exodus 24. Yet he also had

long periods of simply serving in the Tent of Meeting; or travelling through the wilderness alongside Moses and the people.

During these years he had moments where he was given a key leadership responsibility – he led the army into battle against the Amalekites in Exodus 17; he was one of the spies who entered Canaan, in Numbers 13 & 14. He and Caleb were the only 2 who spoke up for entering the Promised Land immediately believing that God was greater than any of the obstacles they had observed.

I have a sense of having had a long preparation for this role. It has included times of taking major responsibility. It includes some wonderful experiences of God's presence and love. But huge tracts of it have been simply filled with getting on with life day to day seeking to serve the Lord in the ordinary and mundane.

- B) But after this long period of preparation Joshua had to step up to be the overall leader of God's people. He knew that he was commissioned by God (Nu 27.12ff, Dt 1.38; 3.21-28 & 31.3-23) and by God's people to be their leader.

I take up this new responsibility, where I know the buck stops at my door, with a deep sense that this is God's call and commission. But equally the assurance from God's people in many places, not least the Diocese itself, that you commission me to this task in the name of the Lord.

- C) In taking up this role Joshua was encouraged to know God's presence and enabling. He was both commanded and encouraged not to be afraid or discouraged (Dt 3.21-28; 31.6-8,23; Josh 1.6,7,9). There is a clear indication in the repeated nature of these words that Joshua needed to be reminded of these words regularly. He perhaps had a tendency to fear and to discouragement.

I too need to be encouraged; fear does creep in. I can be nervous; I can worry; I can be fearful. I am not a natural adventurer. Yet I believe God calls us to be risk takers; people who put their foot into the flowing water of the river Jordan confident that God will keep his promise and the waters will stop flowing. We are to be a people who will step out of the boat and get onto the water. At times I need to be reminded when halfway on such a journey to keep at it; to be encouraged and reminded

of God's words, 'Do not be afraid; for I am with you. I will not fail you or forsake you.'

When the Lord tells Moses to appoint Joshua as his successor it is specifically 'so that the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.' (Nu 27.17) God's people need one who will lead them; not in any way other than that of a servant. But one who will lead because God cares for his people. Now this is a very specific link with Jesus, the Joshua of the New Testament. When Jesus saw the crowd he had compassion on them because they were 'like sheep without a shepherd'. He taught, proclaimed and healed because of his deep heart love for God's people. It is my prayer that I will be able to mirror something of our Lord's pattern in this role as your bishop.

## **JOHN**

Now I want to turn to our reading from John. John tells us of the risen Jesus, 'Yeshua' appearing to the disciples in the Upper Room. His words to them are clear; he brings God's peace, his shalom, his wholeness to them in their fear. But then quite rapidly he moves them away from themselves to those outside; 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' Their task is clear – they are sent out by the Lord. John's gospel has a running theme of Jesus being the one who is sent; sent to do the Father's will; sent for the sake of the world; sent to be lifted up on the Cross; sent to reveal the Father. In the same way the disciples, and now we, are a commissioned, a sent people. Just like Joshua, and even more like our Lord Jesus, we are sent to do the Father's will. We are sent for the sake of the world; sent to go the way of the Cross; sent to reveal the Father. We are a people with a mission. But it is not our own; it is God's mission into which he invites us, and commands us to share.

The early church kept discovering that this missionary calling was in continual development; this is clear in the story of the Acts. But it was always about Jesus Christ as Lord. It showed itself in the way the community of Jesus lived together in the world. It was marked by humble service. It always included the clear telling of the story of Jesus, and

especially his entering into a fully human life, his dying, rising, ascending, reigning and return.

The church has continued to work out this mission through the ages. Today I happily share David Bosch's summary, *'mission is, quite simply, the participation of Christians in the liberating mission of Jesus ... wagering on a future that verifiable experience seems to belie. It is the good news of God's love, incarnated in the witness of a community, for the sake of the world.'* This mission includes *'witness, service, justice, healing, reconciliation, liberation, peace, evangelism, fellowship, church planting, contextualisation, and much more.'*

### **AN AWESOME CALLING**

This is an awesome calling and commission. Who is able to undertake or sustain such a call? Joshua felt unable to do so; so did the first disciples; and so do we. Yet God does call us to be his people in the world through whom the good news of God's love for all is made known.

In our two stories we have key pointers as to how we can be sustained in this call.

### **THE WORD OF THE LORD**

Joshua was given clear instructions. The Book of the Law was to be close by him every day of his life. It was to be his companion, guide and fuel. He was to meditate on it, that is chew on it like a cow chews the cud. But he was to do so not so that he knew it better in his head. He was to do so in order that he knew how he, and the people, were to live. The word of the Lord is always to be turned into lived lives.

We need to be a people who both personally and corporately read, think on, pray over, seek to understand this book in such a way that it transforms the way we live.

### **THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT**

We are powerless to live by the way of this book; we need God's power. This is why Jesus breathes the Spirit upon the disciples. He has exercised his own life and ministry in the power of the Spirit. He knew it is the only way,

they could fulfil their mission. He knows it is the only way we can fulfil ours. We need the power of the presence of God. Let us be a people who know we are dependent on the Spirit. Let us continually cry out to be filled with the Spirit. Let us be a people who let the water of life flow into and out through us.

### **THE CENTRALITY OF FORGIVENESS**

The centrality of forgiveness in Jesus' instruction to his disciples is clear. It is here in John but it is also found in the other gospels. People need forgiveness. Guilt pervades our society in so many ways. People live with guilt, for their dishonesty, their failed marriages, their failure as parents, or as children, their abortions, their lack of care and much else besides. A psychiatrist friend told me a few years ago that a resolution of guilt would see his hospital massively reduced in numbers.

I make mistakes; I need forgiveness. You will need at times to offer God's forgiveness to me just as I will offer it to you. We can only offer the wonderful grace of God's forgiveness as we experience it ourselves. Church congregations must be models of forgiving communities offering the grace of God to all.

### **MUTUAL ENCOURAGEMENT**

Joshua needed to be encouraged by the people. All of us indeed need to be encouraged day by day. This encouragement comes directly through a word, a card, a smile, above all through prayer. It is so easy to discourage by a look, a sharp word, a silence, a failure to thank. Living in a cynical and satirical society leads us so easily to conform to the ways of society with one another. But we need to be encouraged by one another. I will seek to encourage you in your ministries, in your part in God's mission. Please also recognise that I need to be encouraged as well.

### **KEEPING THE VISION CLEAR**

The vision we have of God's rule coming; his will being done on earth as it is in heaven, is a big and broad vision. God's mission is not rescuing a few souls from hell it is the total renewal of the whole of creation in and through Christ. This is why it is about evangelism and social action; as

Walter Brueggemann puts it, *'responsible faith attends to both serious evangelism and intentional social action'*.

We will be sustained in our calling by keeping this vision clear.

## **CONCLUSION**

So I draw to a conclusion.

Together we have a God given call and commission. It is very different from that of Joshua and the people of Israel yet from them we learn much about how the same Lord calls and sustains us. It is very similar to the call given to the first disciples. We still proclaim God's amazing grace and forgiveness In Christ through the power of the Spirit.

Every time we gather around the Lord's Table to share bread and wine we are reminded both of our need for forgiveness, and assured that through the death and resurrection of Jesus that forgiveness is secured. In that same eucharist we always have opportunity to listen to and meditate on the Word of the Lord; in the sharing of the Peace and through worshipping together we are mutually encouraged. This celebration also reminds us of the clear vision we have. It also acts to renew us, and from it we are sent out afresh to serve the Lord in the world in the power of the Spirit.

May our most wonderful Lord take us forward into the Promised Land of the kingdom of God.