

Synod 2017

After dinner, last night we had a quiz and in thinking of how to present my report at this Synod, I thought I would use my 3 Ms presentation – Mission: Ministry: Money

But as I introduce each section I will give you a quiz question of a quotation from English literature, which helps to focus our thoughts.

And so, I begin with Mission – of which novel is this the opening sentence?

‘It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven , we were all going direct the other way’

Thus, begins A Tale of Two Cities, by Dickens. The next sentence ends

‘In other words, things in general were settled forever’ which is the complete opposite of what Mission is all about

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times – think about it and most of us can resonate with that statement and that statement surely applies to any of our congregations meeting for worship on any Sunday morning. For some people, it is the best of times, for others it is the worst of times, and yet both are part of an experience of the living God.

And when you recognise that fact, when you hold up the mirror of faith to your own life and experience, then you begin to understand who what and why Jesus Christ is, was and will be. To see your own reflection, to see your own story in the story of Jesus Christ then faith helps you make sense of the best of times and the worst of times.

Another way of putting it is to say faith gives you an interpretative framework for your own life and experience.

Jesus life showed us that love can never be torn from us, taken from us, it will always be the power and the force which brings Heaven to earth. That’s what Jesus life, death and resurrection is all about, that is our experience of the living God, that is ‘Living our Vision’ of building God’s kingdom in our Diocese.

‘Living our Vision’ – it remains my great ambition that in the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles, every member of every congregation if asked in the Post Office on Monday morning – why to you go to that cold, dilapidated, damp, funny old Church on a Sunday morning – my ambition and hope is that every member of our Diocese will say ‘because there, I have an experience of the living God’ that is the response of the disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ, there we **are** living our vision.

It sounds so simple and yet the simple, real, statements about our faith; we are only able to make those statements when we are fed and nourished by God’s Word in scripture and receiving God’s grace in the sacrament of Holy Communion. We have such a Vision of God’s love and understanding and care in Word and Sacrament.

In our Liturgy – think of it – we act out the fact that it is the best of times, it is the worst of times. When we feel, feel, the fact that in Word and Sacrament we encounter the living God then numbers, buildings, money cease to worry us so much. And when in living our vision, **we** feel God’s presence then mysteriously, wonderfully, many of the practical issues cease to have a stranglehold over us, we communicate a sense of excitement, enthusiasm, of Living our Vision in God’s presence and the other issues resolve themselves or we see them in a different perspective and they cease to be so important.

Mission is an attitude of mind, that’s why the strap line of the ‘Living our Vision’ programme is ‘from membership to discipleship’. We are not just members of a club who meet in expensive buildings on a Sunday morning. We are disciples of Jesus Christ, who experience God’s grace. Grace which means we can grow as people in the power of the Holy Spirit and we expect, expect, things to happen because we are Living our Vision.

In the last year we have had two ordinations to the priesthood in our Diocese, Rosemary Bungard on Skye and Elaine Garman on Bute. They were both spectacular occasions but on both occasions, there were small incidents which showed: Here are congregations who can say we are ‘Living the Vision’ because the incidents I’m recounting couldn’t, wouldn’t just happen.

On Skye, which has more denominations that I have fingers and toes and to be honest, woman’s ministry isn’t even acknowledged in most of them. For the ordination, most of the churches in Portree were represented, well I can have this effect But in a packed church almost all of the congregation

received Holy Communion and in talking to one of the leaders of an evangelical community centre congregation afterwards – he said ‘there was such a sense of God’s presence, it was so exciting I literally couldn’t stay in my seat.

Now 50 years ago, I couldn’t have told you that story because it was against Canon Law. **But** on an occasion of a Bishop celebrating women’s ministry, a woman priest, wonderfully, Living our vision is a reality.

On Bute for Elaine’s ordination the deal was that the ordination on Saturday was in Bute and on Sunday morning she would celebrate the Eucharist for the first time in Dunoon, so I said I would stay on Bute and I thought it will never work because Dunoon will come to Bute on Saturday and Bute will go to Dunoon on Sunday. But they didn’t. Two congregations working together know who they are and are mature in saying we are living **our** vision.

On the Sunday morning, I thought, it’ll be like the Sunday after Christmas, because it’s only really the season ticket holders you expect – but they were all there and in the quietness and afterglow there was an experience of God which remains with me.

And there were some visitors, one of whom said to me as he left – I wasn’t here yesterday but I feel the joy and the hope today – ‘Living Our Vision’ as disciples of Jesus Christ we can lift the veil between Heaven and earth.

And so, **to Ministry** and the quiz question

‘The past is a foreign country – they do things differently there’

L P Hartley’s the Go Between

In terms of the Scottish Episcopal Church – the past is a foreign country where the difference is – more people came to **my** church, **they** gave more money and they brought **their** very quiet children to sit and listen and learn from **the** leader who was a clergy man. And Bishops were treated like citizens of the USA and all those who do not speak proper English. They are of limited intelligence and if you just speak more slowly and more loudly, then when He say No **you** will teach him that He meant: Yes.

The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there because memory, memory is a long way from what the disciples of Jesus mean by using the word ‘Remembrance.’ Remembrance is part of the experience of the living God.

Because in the narrative, the past memory becomes the present reality and that gives us future hope.

Past memory. Present reality. Future Hope. In the Eucharist Jesus says 'Do this in remembrance of me'. So there in the narrative is the memory. Jesus promised – I am with you always – so that narrative becomes in bread and wine a present reality and it is that reality which gives us future hope. Gives us an experience of the living God but also lifts the veil between heaven and earth.

That is what the Hebrew concept of Remembrance is all about. One of my favourite examples is the Exultet, the Easter proclamation which by tradition ushers in Eastertide. In that proclamation, the Deacon sings, 'This is the night when first **you** brought **your** people dry shod through the Red Sea.'

Last Holy Week and Easter I was with the congregation of the West Highland region. On Easter day Duror Church was packed in way it hadn't been for years, there were visitors, there were children. We began with a very simple vigil and the Easter proclamation. There are three reasons to tell you this story

1. The WHR is basically one congregation with 6 buildings but by meeting and worshiping together, they are growing, spiritually and indeed numerically. They experience the living God, not just as a memory of how things were in the past.
2. Easter 2016 in WHR actually proved that our liturgy of Word and Sacrament really does speak for itself. It really is an opportunity to offer visitors an experience of the living God and show how disciples of Jesus are living our vision. This is what we have to offer. And
3. You don't have to have vast numbers of people, or be the Cathedral, to offer in the liturgy of Word and Sacrament an experience of the living God that so many people crave. What you need is a group of disciples who understand that liturgy and scripture they seek to offer to others. Disciples who are prepared to meet to share scripture and to build up a relationship of trust which shares feelings and experience of God in the group.

The inter regnum in WHR is now approaching the end of its second year. We expect to interview two candidates at the end of the month having already interviewed and not appointed. And what that shows is God's time is not our

time and that a period of inter regnum may encourage good things to happen, which is what has happened in WHR.

The WHR has taken a lot of my time which has limited the time I have had to visit other places, which I hope will change this year as we make an appointment so I can travel to other places.

One of the things we all live with in the Diocese is the challenge of geography. From the Butt of Lewis via Fort William to Dunoon is a lot of miles and even more water. It always amuses me that even those in the Central Belt, never mind further south. People look at the mileage and then calculate timing based on driving along the M8. We all know the facts and the vagaries of living with single track roads, ferries, storm warnings Which give another dimension to travel.

That is a prelude to explaining that I do also have significant Provincial responsibilities as Bishop, which someone asked me about recently and told me that I should say more in the Diocese about the Provincial aspect of life. One of the things I would say at this point is that my contribution as Diocesan Bishop, is made on behalf of the whole Diocese and because of some of the things I am involved in, it does help the Diocesan voice in the Province. And what is true for me, is also true of clergy and laity who serve on Provincial Boards and committees and together Argyll and the Isles makes a significant contribution to Provincial life.

From my own perspective, I am the convenor of the Scottish Episcopal Institute Council, which is responsible for the theological and practical training of clergy and Lay readers throughout the Province. The Council has made an incredible impact on selection and training in the last 3 years. We now have a student cohort of 24, there are 8 ordinands training for full time ministry and we will have a glut of curates next year.

I am also a member of the Provincial Standing Committee which is responsible for the work of General Synod between meetings. It is the executive committee of the Synod, and handles a lot of business. At the moment, we're looking for a way forward for the Province to become more fit for purpose in the 21st Century, which is very exciting if somewhat exhausting. I mention this because our Diocese has a significant contribution to make and significant insights to offer.

All our Bishops have representative roles and among mine this year will be to represent SEC at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Elspeth and I also represented the SEC at the joyous occasion of the Consecration of the first woman Bishop in Wales. I also attended a 3 day meeting in Oxford of all the Bishops of the UK.

Looking ahead – the Bishop of St Andrews will soon retire which will be the second Episcopal vacancy in the Province. I will be handling the St Andrews vacancy. Loch Tay and the roads through rural Perthshire are not my favourite. In fact, I always think that they make the road for Oban to Lochgilphead look like a dual carriageway. However

Our Diocesan life is nurtured by disciples, lay and ordained, who exercise leadership which in turn is nourished by continuous reflection, learning and development. There are at least 2 Lay Leadership days a year are particularly stimulating for me. The last one and the next one focus on group work equipping individuals and congregations for living the vision and sharing that vision as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Clergy who are members of the Pension Fund meet twice a year to reflect and study together and we are richly blessed in having Canon Anne Dyer of Edinburgh Diocese as our companion during those times.

One aspect of Lay leadership which is often over looked is community involvement; Living the vision as a disciple in a community. Last December Alistair Chisholm was given a BEM and I thank Alistair for all his work on Cumbrae. In my support for the award I highlighted how Alistair had opened up the Cathedral and college to the whole community through his music programme. Andrew our Dean was made Deputy Lieutenant in recognition of this work in the community. Alistair's and Andrew's awards are for living the vision in their communities.

Fr Peter Rice and Fiona will shortly be leaving the Diocese to move nearer family in the South. I would like to thank Peter for his significant contribution to the life of the Diocese and also to thank all the retired clergy who help the Diocese not only live but to flourish.

Talking of flourishing and so to Money

And the third quiz question

Who wrote the novel – The Way We Live Now?

The answer is of course, Anthony Trollope more famous for the Barsetshire Chronicles. But the Way We Live Now has always been one of my favourites, because it explores how love of money may corrupt, which is always an interesting concept for disciples of Jesus – to whom money has to be the sacrament of seriousness.

The sacrament, the outward and visible sign of seriously Living the Vision of building God's Kingdom **and** paying for it, as disciples of Jesus Christ.

In all the literature on helping Churches grow, making new disciples, helping people have an experience of the living God. All church growth material will tell you that the membership church is one in which people will give enough to keep things going and if a roof repair is necessary they will miraculously find enough money to do it.

The Church of disciples will give at a level which actually allows more to be done that simply maintain things as they are. In small congregations that may mean giving so members may attend Diocesan and Provincial events. Congregations may realise their ancient bathroom facilities are holding them back. Bigger congregations realise with a big push they might employ a youth worker, pay for full time ordained leadership. We have examples in this Diocese.

Obviously, I stand here as your Bishop, fully aware of the fact that to have a Bishop is an expensive business but we are a Diocese and an Episcopal Church and I personally take giving and stewardship very seriously. And I am talking about money because the mission and ministry of the church cannot go forward without it. It is the cost of discipleship.

Yes, there must be accountability. Yes, structures can be changed to be more efficient. One of the things that the Scottish Episcopal Church needs to consider is that if the whole of Scotland is to be served, then perhaps a more efficient way of paying the Bishops might be that they are paid centrally. But the actual money used to pay will still have to be raised locally.

Still Elspeth and I visit congregations where there are no gift aid envelopes. Still Charges do not make quinquennial reports an agenda item of importance at vestry meetings. Still Vestries do not explore grant aid from the Province and other sources. This is poor stewardship and especially as we are only trustees of historical resources in the form of buildings.

To paraphrase the Victorian saying: You should leave this world a better place than it was when you entered it. Well, we should leave the buildings we inherit in a better condition than they were when we inherited them.

And we are all responsible because we are the Body of Christ and if one limb is weak, we are all weak.

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is the most exciting way of life. Our Lord Jesus Christ invites us to look at the works through God's eyes of love in the best of times and in the worst of times, which is now, because the past is foreign country and love is about the way we live now