



THE ARCHBISHOP  
OF YORK

The Archbishop addressed York Diocesan Synod today who were meeting online due to ongoing COVID restrictions. The address follows in full:

Earlier this week I was interviewed by Petroc Trelawny for the [Radio 3 breakfast programme](#). They were in York, recording a series of broadcasts about the River Ouse. Some of you may have heard them.

I have to confess that I'm someone who usually gets up with Radio 4 and the cut, thrust, parry, counter punch and political obfuscations of the Today Programme. I say to myself that it keeps me up-to-date with current affairs. But I'm not sure how healthy it is to wake up to this each day.

On Thursday I turned the dial. Not only did I hear some beautiful music, they had also done some recordings of the water running over the weir at Naburn. I think it was better for my mental health. And certainly better preparation for going down to the chapel to say my prayers. But, if you did happen to listen to the programme, I also made the point that sometimes – and especially in this fine weather – I don't go to the chapel to say my prayers, but sit by the river and say them there. Because I believe there is so much we can learn from a river. Indeed, the reason I was on the programme wasn't just because I happened to live next door to the Ouse, but because I was being asked to read a poem about the wisdom of rivers. I'll come onto the poem in a moment, but first let us wade out a little from the bank and see what we can learn from a river, especially for the challenges we face as a diocese, as a nation and as a world today.

As the opening line of the poem you will hear in a moment declares: the river is not a straight line. It does not run from A to B.

The river follows the contours of the land. It goes at its own pace.

We find ourselves in the middle of a vitally important series of consultations about how we are called to live out our Christian faith in the diocese of York. An important part of this is to so transform our finances and structures that we will discover sustainable ways of continuing our ministry and supporting worshipping communities of all types and sizes in all the communities we serve, rural as well as urban, wealthy as well as poor: indeed, through mustard seed and multiply projects, to grow new ones. I think we will best achieve this by following the contours of the land.

What I mean by this, is that we will go with the flow of the energy and resources we already have.

What does this mean in practice?

Well, of course, I don't really know. I still don't know the communities of our diocese well enough.

But you do. You are the experts with intimate knowledge, commitment and love for your own communities. Therefore, if we commit ourselves to working together then there is every possibility that we can find the right ways of being the church in and for each locality. But it might mean letting go of certain presuppositions about what a church is.

Don't misunderstand me, I love and cherish the built heritage of our parish churches. But the church is not a building.

Don't misunderstand me, I absolutely value and cherish the clergy (I'm one of them after all!). But the church is not the priest.

Don't misunderstand me, I value the history of parish and place upon which the Church of England's ministry has been built for centuries. But the church is not the parish.

If we carry on holding onto only one model of what it is to be a church, then we might fail to see that if we just allowed the river of our life in Christ to meander off in this apparently counter intuitively strange direction – not going from A to B at all, but actually, for the moment, appearing to go backwards – we would find a way forwards.

This way of being the church will be based on several vital principles.

First, that ministry belongs to everyone, to the whole people of God because of our baptism. We are the Church: the people of God in all our communities of faith.

Secondly, that the diocese is us, not someone else, not head office, wherever that is, not bishop or archdeacon, not even Incumbent. But us. And we have a commitment to each other and to every community, not just our own.

Thirdly, we need the oversight of bishop and priest. And we need the resourcing for training and housing and safeguarding and communications that comes from the so called centre. But as I said to the General Synod last Monday, the centre is Christ, and our becoming like Christ is the centre of our vision to tell Christ's story; and the primary task of those of us who are called to lead and oversee the Church is to encourage and facilitate the ministry of everyone.

This might – please underline the word might – mean fewer stipendiary clergy in some places. It might not. That really depends on how much money we can raise. But it must mean more self-supporting clergy and lay ministry. It might lead to some lay led congregations. It might lead to some churches reimagining themselves as very successful house groups, rather than failed cathedrals.

In fact, we will probably worry about numbers less, because we will care about people more. We will want to serve everyone. And we will definitely want there to be more expressions of church life. But it will be a mixed ecology church, where under the oversight of bishop and Incumbent (and of course still governed by Canon law, and of course still arising from our parish system) churches working together will find new ways of doing things. Mustard seeds will sprout and flourish. Good things will multiply. And, of course, there will be some failures along the way, and times when the river doesn't seem to be flowing at all.

This is daunting. But we needn't be fearful. The challenges we face are large, but we have faced similar things before. Actually, we are ~~only~~ really a

few turns in the river away from the rushing water that will speed us along. With only a little more generosity, most of our financial challenges would be solved as a stroke. With only a little more vision, and a little more courage, I think we can find ways of sustaining and transforming our life.

But it won't be like a graph that is steadily going in one direction. Nor a Roman road crossing the terrain in a straight line and sweeping away everything in its path.

It will be like a river, which bends this way and that, but eventually, steadily, opens into a wide, wide estuary and then into the sea itself.

And the heart of our vision to live Christ's story is of course the invitation that we become more like Christ ourselves. He is the one who climbs into our boat, as he did with Peter, and invites us to push out from the shore and prepare our nets for a catch.

Yesterday morning, I was back with Radio 4. And to my surprise I was again waking up to the sound of water. But this time it was terrifying. In the Rhineland and surrounding regions three months-worth of rain had fallen in a single day. Small streams had become raging torrents. Rivers had burst their banks. Houses swept away. Power supplies cut off. Many people were missing. We still don't know how many have died.

There is little doubt that the cause of this is global warming.

Unless we are able to learn the lessons of what's happening around us and see that our straight lines and graphs that only go upwards are destroying the planet, these are events we may have to get used to. And their devastating consequences.

We are going to have to change. And I believe the church of Jesus Christ is called to lead the way. We are going to have to learn to live with less and to be satisfied with enough. Our insatiable desire for everything, will leave us with nothing.

We need to see what's happening and change direction. We need to follow the contours of the land, living with our creation, not against it. Again, the river can teach us, and we must respect its place in the complex ecology of the planet.

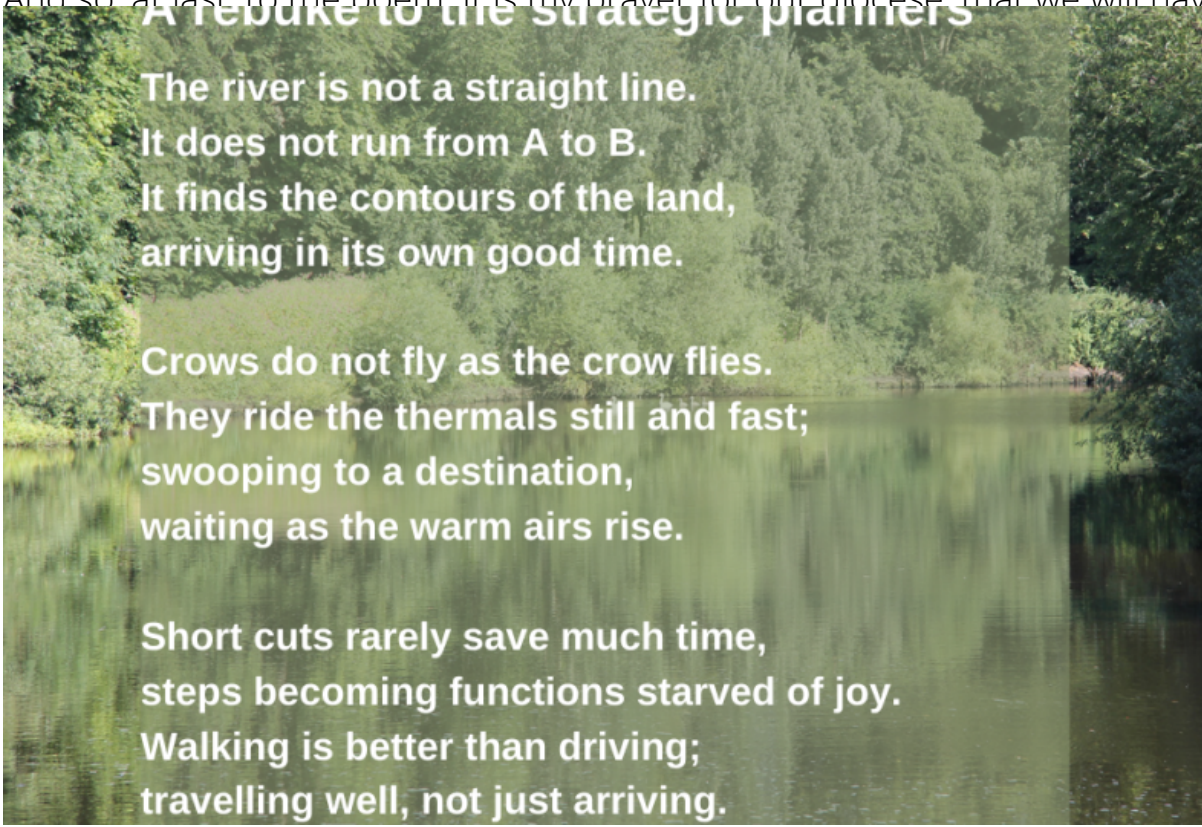
If you come to Bishopthorpe Palace and stand by the Ouse there are various small plaques on the walls marking where the river rose during some of the great floods of the last few hundred years.

I've still lived there less than a year, but already the river has flooded twice and on both occasions the water level was higher than the marks on the wall a century ago. But we no longer put up plaques. What was a 'once every century or so' occurrence is now commonplace.

Our diocesan vision calls us to grow a church of missionary disciples. This means living out the five marks of mission. All of them. Mindful again

this week of the shocking racism aimed at three young black footballers, we must work to transform the unjust structures of our society. And, of course, we must strive to safeguard the integrity of the creation. Discussions this morning on the environment and racial justice will be signs of how we, the diocese of York, will live out Christ story in the world today, telling the story of Christ, but also living it.

And so, at last, to the poem. It is my prayer for our diocese that we will have the imagination and the vision to do things differently, but also the faith in us, who loves us and believes in us, and entrusts his mission to us.



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