

The Archbishop of York gave the Presidential address to the virtual York Diocesan Synod today. This follows in full...

Living Christ's Story the name we give to how we are responding to the call of Christ in the York diocese at the moment, becoming more like Jesus, reaching people who do not yet know him, growing in discipleship, and in order to do all these things sustainably, transforming our finances and structures.

We have embarked upon an ambitious and extensive journey of change and development and I want to take this opportunity of thanking the clergy, the lay ministers, churchwardens and parishes of the diocese for the way you have so generously and creatively responded to this challenge, though I do not underestimate how hard it is going to be, not least because many of us are feeling tired and stretched after two years of living with Covid. Some parishes are finding it hard to find lay officers, and many other challenges besides. We are all feeling exhausted. We will need, therefore, to pay attention to the pace at which we move as well as the direction. We will only do this if we do it together. We don't want anyone to feel left behind.

Moreover, the recent challenge of increased inflation and higher energy bills for everyone has hit and is hitting everyone, but it is hitting our poorest communities really hard and adds a level of complexity and challenge that we could have done without. But you know that as a diocese, we have not been living within our means, and you don't need me to tell you that no organisation can survive for long unless it takes account of these basic economic realities.

Actually, it is both harder and easier for us.

Harder, because we are not really an organisation at all, but the community of Jesus Christ - women and men who know him and follow him - with a vocation to give away everything we have.

But, easier, because we have the promise and assurance that God is with us. We have the gift and outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We know that in Christ all things are possible. Therefore, despite all the challenges, despite the tiredness and difficulty of it all, we are not downhearted. Therefore, we are sustained by hope.

And, to bolster that hope, we have also recently received a substantial grant - £850,000 - from the Church of England's Strategic Capacity Fund to help us scope and develop our plans for transformed growth as we develop plans following our recent consultation with all the deaneries. This is a big encouragement. Among others, I want to particularly thank Peter Warry, our Diocesan Secretary, Ian McIntosh our Director of Mission and Ministry, and Sam Rushton who has been seconded from her role as Archdeacon of York to help make the plans that have been agreed by Archbishop's Council and this Synod a reality. I also want to thank this Synod itself for its faithfulness and vision.

The next few years are not going to be easy. But I think, under God, we are beginning to see a way forward.

However, today I am saying we are called to live Christ's story as we are about to begin our journey through Holy Week, the greatest and most important week of the Christian year. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to remember that to live the story of Christ is to live the story of one who was misunderstood and rejected; of one who washed his disciples' feet; of one who suffered on the cross and says to those who follow him that they must carry a cross too.

There is a cost to our discipleship. Following Jesus - living his story - means being called to new things and to a life of generosity and sacrifice.

I will continue to do all that I can to help the York diocese move forward into a transformed and flourishing future. But I can't pretend to you that there aren't challenges ahead and we must not shirk from them. One of them appears briefly on our agenda today, that is the issue of racial justice.

The letter to the Ephesians speaks about the death of Christ as breaking down barriers of separation and of making peace. Again and again, the Apostle Paul describes the new humanity we have in Christ as being something which draws us together, which removes the obstacles of division, which prevents us from separating from our neighbour.

I am delighted to be commissioning our Racial Justice team and Racial Justice Champions today. Their work will be vital to help us better reflect the life we see in Christ, and help us be a more diverse church, and be able to reach out to all people and all communities. I am very grateful for those who have offered themselves in this ministry.

Finally, we meet and say these things, and we celebrate Holy Week and Easter, against the backdrop of a world where there is even greater instability and uncertainty. Russia's terrible invasion of Ukraine has already changed Europe and changed the world, showing us that peace is something we should never have taken for granted.

We need to welcome refugees (and I'm glad for the work on that that's begun in the diocese), give aid to the beleaguered and suffering people of Ukraine, use every diplomatic channel available to bring an end to the fighting, and invest again in those international bodies that are one of the ways on Earth that we demonstrate the one humanity that we have in Christ. Moreover, this new refugee crisis in Europe should remind us of the other terrible conflicts and refugee crises across the world, conflicts and displacement of people that are too easily ignored. Last week I was with Primates from across the Anglican Communion and heard at first-hand what this is like in some of the countries where they serve. As Christians, we must take a lead in making peace across all of the world. We must serve one another. And that was before I also heard from them about the devastating effects of climate change, of persecution in some places and of poverty.

Tomorrow, we will wave our branches and sing Hosanna. Next Sunday we will reaffirm the promises of our baptism and sing Alleluia. Please, please, please, can we make sure that on the days in between, we gather at the cross, for on the cross we see the length and depth of God's love for us in Christ, the cost of that love, and God's passionate commitment to the world he loves.

In so doing, not only will the Alleluias we sing have more meaning, but we ourselves will find again the resolve we need to rebuild God's church and - most of all - to remember why we're doing it. Not for our own survival. Not to balance the books. Not so that we can appear to be successful. We are doing this so that we are better able to live and share God's peace in the world. That peace which flows from the broken heart of Jesus on the cross - this is what the Church is for. This is why we live Christ's story.

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