



THE ARCHBISHOP  
OF YORK

The Archbishop addressed York Diocesan Synod today. The reading Matthew 9.14-17. The address follows in full

Jesus preached an astonishing message of grace and love.

It was radical - i.e., it got to the root of the matter.

It was profoundly new and yet at the same time a reworking of what was there already.

He took the story of the Old Testament – of God’s love and justice and grace – and repurposed it, putting new wine into new skins.

He told disturbing stories that challenged how we see ourselves and how we saw the world.

He hung out with sinners and those on the margins and all the wrong sort of people; and he dared his disciples to do the same. To let go of the old ways of doing things and embrace the new commandment of love, a way that was scandalously hospitable to – well, everyone.

As Christ’s disciples today, here in the great diocese of York, we are called to do this as well. We are the church for everyone in this diocese and with a responsibility everywhere. We are asked to take the old story of God’s love and justice and grace and turn it into new wine for 2022.

But there is a but coming.

As well as ‘new wine in new wineskins’ so the wine is not lost, Jesus says that no one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away and the tear is made worse.

Well, I’m sure he’s right when it comes to working with unshrunk cloth that will then shrink and pull away, but watching the Sewing Bee the other week – yes, I like to watch the Sewing Bee and before you ask, no, I don’t sew – I gained some other insights that I think are relevant ~~here~~.

It was Japanese week, and the contestants were asked to do a variation on the well-known Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold to create something beautiful and new, and yet still bearing the scars of its brokenness.

It was the Transformation Challenge, and the sewers were given some torn denim skirts and jackets and asked to patch and repair them to make a new garment; but not repaired in a way that would make them seem 'as good as new', but where the now beautified holes and tears were part of the garment, a technique called Sashiko.

Jesus does this as well. He makes things new. But the scars are often visible. It is through the cracks, said Leonard Cohen, that the light gets in.

Our task in diocese of York is to live and tell this story with great faithfulness to Jesus and to the revelation of God's love that is given us in the whole of scripture, for both Old and New Testament are the foundations for our theology, but to do so, because we are faithful to Jesus the one who died on the cross and whose risen body still bears the marks of the nails, by sharing our own vulnerability, nor pretending we have all the answers, being honest about failure in a way that is gracious and undefended, being determined to live as well as tell Christ's story.

For we are not trying to build the earthly empire of a human institution, nor merely trying to survive, but to grow and participate in the Kingdom of God, which as we well know in the diocese of York usually begins in small ways with mustard seeds, handfuls of yeast, a widow's mite and few pieces of bread.

The message is always the same – the big God of small beginnings and fantastic endings, but the way in which we are called to participate in God's Kingdom and God's mission in this world will look different, because life is different, and our context constantly changing.

So, could I say a huge thank you through this Synod to the amazing and faithful work that is going on in parishes and deaneries to work out how we will build a sustainable and flourishing future, and set about the transformative change that we believe, under God, will bring growth and renewal to the church, always remembering that beyond the number crunching of the strategy, there is the vision of making Christ's story known afresh, inspiring new participation in God's Kingdom and working out what our part of the story is across all the towns, cities and villages of our diocese.

In this Synod, we will hear about the progress we are making, and I want also to thank my colleagues in the leadership team of the diocese as well as Area and Lay Deans for all the work that has gone into this, and especially Archdeacon Sam for the patient and tenacious way she is bringing this together.

There is much to celebrate – which is why our synods – and how good it is to at last be meeting in person - should be joyful occasions.

We celebrate the appointment this week of Eleanor Sanderson as the new Bishop of Hull bringing with her from New Zealand where she has served as priest and Bishop, many insights, particularly into discipleship and Christian community that will enrich our witness.

We celebrate all those who have been ordained as priest or deacon in the diocese in the past month; the appointment of a new DDO, and a fresh resolve to encourage across the whole diocese a new springtime in Christian ministry and mission, where each of us will discover the part we have to play, allowing God to patch us up and make us even more beautiful, even bearing beautiful scars like his.

We celebrate the work that is done day in day out, week in week out, year in year out, in a parishes and chaplaincies and multiply and mustard seed ministries and in the daily lives of thousands of Christian people who bear witness to Christ and long to see his Kingdom come.

Just as Jesus says to the pharisees that you don't fast while the bridegroom is with you, so we rejoice because God is with us, Jesus is with us, the Spirit is at work among us, that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church; that, yes, we are facing big challenges and painful change, but we have confidence in God and confidence in the gospel and bear witness today and give thanks for all that God has done in Jesus Christ, committing ourselves to him as we serve this diocese of York and live Christ's story.

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