



Archbishop Stephen addressed York Diocesan Synod today. The address follows in full

In the reading at Morning Prayer, we heard Jesus say:

‘Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will wear’ (Matthew 6. 25).

And later ‘So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today’ (Matthew 6. 34).

Well, I wonder what we make of this advice, when, frankly, there is so much to worry about. We're worrying about war in our world, especially in Israel and Gaza. But just last week, I also received messages from the Archbishop of Sudan asking for prayer for that forgotten region. And of course, the war in Ukraine goes on.

We worry about the state of the earth and how climate change will impact our daily lives, we worry about floods and droughts, about wild storms and famine.

Nearer to home, we worry about the cost-of-living crisis. And as another winter takes hold, we worry about those who cannot afford to heat their homes, to eat, to buy clothes, even here in communities in our own diocese.

Saying do not worry, doesn’t seem to help.

But considering this in light of Living Christ’s Story and all that that means and what that asks of us, we do find ourselves, placing our worries in the bigger framework that Jesus’ life and teaching offers in this very passage from the Sermon on the Mount, which is, ‘Seek first the kingdom of God’ (Matthew 6. 33). Seek first the first priorities of the kingdom: peace, unity, truth and goodness.

And for us personally, as followers of Jesus in all of the muddle that is life, we need to ask ourselves, ‘Lord, how can I be someone who seeks your Kingdom, who hungers and thirsts for what is right?’

So first of all, let me say thank you to all of you, and through you to the parishes, chaplaincies, deaneries that you serve, for your continued engagement with Living Christ’s Story. The stories we are hearing from the diocese are such positive stories of how change is beginning to take shape in many places. We have a long way to go, but I am encouraged that we are journeying there together, and we continue to listen to where Christ is calling us.

This won’t necessarily take the worries away, but we commit to the priorities God has laid upon us to grow in Christlikeness, to become ourselves more like Christ, to reach out to people, to the thousands of people in our diocese who do not yet know Christ, to grow churches of missionary disciples that are younger and more diverse. Just think in the past year of the changes we've made through setting up a racial justice group,

having a racial justice commission, and just last week I was speaking with a priest in the diocese, who is keen to develop work with a very neglected community, the Gypsy, Roma Traveller Community and then of course, to transform our finances and structures, to build God's kingdom in the world of our parishes and our diocese.

And please note, as I'm sure you'll hear more about later, our calling to share the Christian faith with children, families and young people and through our schools, this is beginning to take a more central place in our hopes and in our plans.

Such transformational change takes time, energy and resources. We have much more to do in the coming months. This will require us to continually monitor the progress and impact of these projects that are already underway and some that will need adapting as we learn from this work. And, we intend to communicate more frequently and in more detail about what is happening, not only to keep the diocese informed, but I hope, because I believe this is what God wants, to create a sense of excitement and momentum about what we are doing, because the work of the gospel is exciting. It is so exciting to see people coming to faith in Jesus Christ, as I've had the privilege of seeing just in these past couple of months. I'm particularly thinking of a visit to Humber prison, where the amazing work of the chaplaincy there, is seeing prisoners coming to faith. I'm thinking of a confirmation in Thirsk, where I met young adults who have come to faith. This is all very good news. And there are things to celebrate amidst the challenges and the worries. And we do want every parish and every person to be involved.

Let me then turn to the worries, concerns and opportunities that surround the Living in Love and Faith process and do my best to explain a bit about what the General Synod did and didn't decide this week, since some of the press reports have been a little less than helpful.

The amended motion that was eventually passed on Wednesday after a long and often painful debate as different conscientiously held views were explained and exchanged noted the progress made since the February Synod which asked the House of Bishops to find ways of commending the Prayers of Love and Faith alongside a number of other commitments, not least a heartfelt declaration of repentance for the prejudice and exclusion many LGBTQIA+ people had experienced and sadly sometimes continue to experience in the church. Nothing has yet changed or been introduced, but ways forward and a path to follow is being mapped out. That's really what this Synod was about.

In particular, what will happen next is that the prayers themselves will be commended for use, either privately and pastorally with same-sex couples, or as part of an existing or regular service in church, but standalone services, i.e. that bit of LLF which has received the most publicity, and probably where the greatest disagreement lies, will be subject to a process of authorisation under Canon B2, which would mean that in order to receive final authorisation, there would need to be a two thirds majority in favour in each of the three synodical houses – bishops, clergy, laity.

Leading up to that vote, there will probably be a period of experimentation under Canon B5A. This is the canon allows individual parishes that want to, that opt in, to apply to be able to use material on an experimental basis for a fixed period, at the end of which, Synod considers whether to extend the authorization under B2. That's the vote requiring the two thirds majorities. Doing it this way will be useful way both gauging the feeling of the Church, but also give time to properly consider exactly what sort of pastoral reassurance and provision will be necessary to honour those who in good conscience won't be able to support these developments. Again, I want you to know that I am very committed to ensuring this happens well in the Diocese of York, but also for the whole Church of England, as are my colleagues.

The pastoral guidance concerning what this means for ordinands and clergy, particularly over whether they could be permitted to enter into same-sex marriages themselves is still a work in progress and wasn't really discussed at this synod. But it will be forthcoming in the early part of 2024.

Clergy and parishes in the diocese will be receiving a letter about Synod's decisions next week, explaining what has happened in a bit more detail.

For some parts of our diocese, I know that LLF is proving deeply troubling, and I want here to express my gratitude to those who arranged the meeting for me in Hull a couple of months ago, where, along with Bishop Eleanor, I was able to meet with a large group of people and hear those concerns firsthand. It was a sometimes difficult evening, but a really good evening. Thank you to those who organised that and who were present.

However, I am also aware of those who long to be able to offer Prayers of Love and Faith to same-sex couples. Although the progress towards this for them feels slow, I hope that everyone in the diocese will understand that our commitment to each other within the body of Christ, and therefore our commitment to those with whom we disagree on things like this, requires us, wherever possible, to move together.

I'm, therefore, also very grateful to fellow General Synod members, for the gracious, collaborative, and helpful way we are seeking to work together to ensure that here in this diocese all have an honoured place and all voices are heard.

As I think you know, I support the introduction of these prayers. But not at any price. Truth and unity go together. I also continue to believe that if we can find ways of holding the Church together with our disagreement, then this will be a powerful message of hope to the world.

And it is to our divided world, our polarised society, the siren voices of hatred and mistrust, the echo chambers of social media, the hate speech, antisemitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, racism and its hideous, overflow into violence and conflict that I want to return, for this must be our first concern as followers of Jesus.

'Love your enemy' says Jesus (Matthew 5. 43). 'And if anyone hits you on the right cheek, offer your left as well' (Matthew 5. 39). 'If your enemy is

thirsty, give him a drink' (see Romans 12. 20).

Less than two months ago, Archbishop Hosam, the Anglican Archbishop of Jerusalem, was a guest of mine and the Dean's here in York. We had a wonderful weekend. We were looking forward to a pilgrimage to the Holy Land next year. Now that land, which the three great monotheistic religions of the world call holy, is again engulfed by violence. I want to reiterate here, my condemnation of the attacks on October 7 by the terrorist group Hamas, which lit the fuse for this latest cycle of violence, but also to appeal to the Israeli government to not only conduct its opposition to Hamas in ways that will protect the innocent civilians of Gaza and observe international law, but I can do no other but also cry out for peace, for an end to violence and conflict, and encourage each of us to see in our daily lives - with each other, in the Church and in our society - that peace is a choice. Peace is a way of living and a set of responses that we choose to make, that we decide upon. I note again that Jesus didn't say 'Blessed are the peace lovers'. Loving peace is relatively easy because it's general and abstract. But no. Jesus says 'Blessed are the peacemakers.' Moreover, he calls peacemakers, people who choose peace, who go the second mile to get inside the shoes of those who openly disagree, who choose non-violence, who choose collaboration, he calls peacemakers 'children of God', which therefore means, and this is such a vital message for our church as well as for our world, that we are most like a child of God when we make peace with each other. May it be so in our Church and in our world. Amen.

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