

Presidential Address November 2020

The land yields its harvest; God, our God, blesses us. May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him.

So ends the Psalm we've used as the foundation for our worship today. And I want to point out as we begin – and I hope this isn't controversial - that what it says is *true*. Our God has blessed us, because the land has yielded its harvest. And on the basis of the blessing we've already received, we pray for more: *May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him.*

The psalm is founded – as we ourselves should be founded – on the confidence that our God is a God of blessing and a God of abundance. And that *must* be foundational for us. We all too easily focus on scarcity, on what we lack, when we would do much better to focus on what we have, on what we have been given.

But I do want to say as firmly and clearly as I can that believing and putting our faith in the abundance and blessing of God – 'Rejoicing in the generosity of God', in the language of The Saints' Way - is not an excuse or a recipe for complacency on our part. I do admit you could be forgiven for thinking that is what I am doing, given the nature of the budget you're being asked to approve today (and in what I say today I am focussing on the budget rather than on 'The Saints' Way' as I did last time and indeed will next).

You might reasonably think we're being complacent given the level of deficit we're anticipating; given the level of MMF we're suggesting; given the significant financial hit our churches have taken this year.

I don't believe we are being complacent, and we should not *be* complacent. But nor should we panic. A panicked reaction would be to cut costs, at all costs, no matter what the cost, and I do believe that would be wrong. We need to avoid being opportunistic in favour of being strategic. As Simon said in his letter of last month, '*we do need to make significant changes in patterns of ministry and we are committed to that. Part of the work will be to make ministry affordable, but the first will not be, what can we afford [but] will start with questions like, 'what are we called to be and to do.'*

We need to avoid being opportunistic in favour of being strategic, and I am absolutely committed to that. That means that change must increasingly be on our agenda, in a way it has not been for decades, or even centuries. As +Hugh helpfully put it recently, the question, for all of us, in every part of the Diocese and at every level, is no longer 'do you want to change?' but 'to what extent do you want to be involved in shaping the change?' because change will come. We either seek to *manage* it, profitably, fruitfully and strategically, or else it will *master* us. And the intentional management of change, that

we may be sustainable and fruitful, in mission and ministry, will I think be the defining characteristic of my time as Bishop of Truro.

Let me make two further significant points.

First, the picture across the diocese is far from uniform. It is much more patchy than that. The headline figures conceal as much as they reveal. The underlying issues have been addressed in some places; they remain to be so in others. But if, for example, we decided to freeze all appointments across the diocese – as other dioceses have – than that could well be counterproductive, limiting life and growth in places which have already worked hard to be sustainable and pitching them back into unsustainability. We need to be more strategic and intentional than that.

Second, to quote Simon's letter again: *Our financial situation is serious, but we do not need to panic. We have reserves and investments that will allow us to change the way we work without making knee-jerk emergency cuts in clergy posts or having to freeze all appointments. Our reserves are enough to give us time to change; they do not give us permission to stay the same.*

But for all that I stress again: we must not be complacent and I do not believe we are being: but we must avoid being opportunistic in favour of being strategic.

I think the key question we need to ask is simply this: how is God leading us in all this? What is he saying to us in all this? We have had some very significant change visited on us in the last few months. Some of that has been unwelcome, some disturbing, but much has been significant and, the vaccine notwithstanding, we will not be going back to where we were before. I've said before the model for us not the Exile, with a hope of going back to where we were, but of the Exodus, going forward to a new place of promise.

So the challenge, as we look at our finances, as we develop new models of ministry, as we seek to reach the young, serve the poor and care for the earth, is to ask how we can better use our baptised imaginations to envisage a future that is simply different and better.

More particularly, I think the two words to which we need to give equal attention are *sustainable* and *fruitful*. And we need to give attention to both because we need to find a future that is both. There is no point in being sustainable if we are not also fruitful; but I do not believe we can be fruitful – at least not in any significant way – unless we are also sustainable.

That is where we need to head in mission and ministry and in our finances too: to a situation that is both sustainable and fruitful. And it's to that future I'm determined to lead us.

But even more significantly I believe we can, and we *must*, trust our God to lead us to such a place, because I do believe that is his will for us. It's that twin conviction of sustainability and fruitfulness which underlies Psalm 67, and which allows and encourages us to make these words our own: *The land yields its harvest; God, our God, blesses us. May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear him. Amen*