

Diocesan Synod Presidential Address

Glory to the father, and the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and shall be forever. Amen

Anyone who has ever been to morning or evening prayer will have said these words repeatedly, and if saying 'the office', as it's often called, is part of your daily prayer life, you'll say those words - 'glory to the father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit' 56 times a week. Which means faithful pray-ers of Morning and Evening Prayer will say those words 2912 times a year.

They are, by far and away, the most repeated words of Anglican liturgy.

Say them to yourself now, and notice them - *Glory to the father, and the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and shall be forever. Amen*

These are holy words, weighty words, words that carry deep meaning. These are words worthy of being spoken often and again.

And they do two things.

First, they point us towards God; whatever's going on in our lives, whatever we're feeling, whether everything's on track or it's all chaotic, they point us towards the reality of God. And not just any old god, but God; the God who is Three-in-one and One-in-three; the God who reigns over all creation and who's worthy of its praise and glory; the God who directs all things towards his glorious, grace-filled, ever loving presence. Like a compass pointing us home, these words constantly re-centre us to our true North, to God.

And second, as they do so, they also locate us and the story of our lives within God's much bigger life and much bigger story.

We can only ever live in the present moment, but we do so as part of God's past and future. We can only know God now, in each 'now', but every one of those 'nows' belongs to an eternal past, present and future which is all God's; which is all God's everlasting and faithful 'now', in every moment and for all time.

And those holy words remind us that the glorious presence of God is with us now, and in every now, because God doesn't change. He remains steady, dependable, faithful and present now, as he always has done and as he always will do. Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And maybe these words, which remain part of the steady heart-beat of daily prayer across the diocese today, as they have been for so many generations, are particularly helpful for us at the moment. Because there's lots going on, and there's lots that's changing. That's true in the world, in which we are affected by wars and rumours of war, by rapid changes in technology and increasing levels of deprivation; and it's true in our

churches as we engage deliberately with shifting patterns of faith and belief, and make prayerful - and sometimes difficult - decisions for the future.

And in the midst of all that change, and all the uncertainty it brings, still we say, '*Glory to the father, and the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and shall be forever.*' The world changes, church changes and God is, as he always has been and always will be. And because God is, our call remains the same - to give God glory, which means to orientate our lives to him and to design our lives in the light of his grace, mercy, love and truth. Glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Who were, who are and who ever will be.

And in the midst of change, we know the task that lies before us. We've spent two years listening, praying and discerning what we think the church needs to look like in our parishes and deaneries, and how that needs to be supported as a whole diocese. And the plans we have committed to are good plans; they are plans for a fruitful and sustainable future, and they are shot through with faith and hope and possibility.

And since we were last together for Synod, when we approved the diocesan plan for change and renewal, another change has happened, and Bishop Philip has moved on to Winchester. But because the plans that you have all discerned were never Philip's plans, but belong to you and to each of your deaneries, nothing in them needs to change with his departure. Things might feel a bit different now (and here I am standing here doing this, so they definitely feel different for me!) but our work of implementing our plans doesn't change. We know what we need to do and how we need to do it, and so...on we go in the presence of God who was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.

And making decisions and choices, and then implementing them, matters. We know how easy it is to avoid difficult decisions and to find good reasons not to make the changes we know we need to make. There are things we know we need to do.

But the life of the church is never just about the things we do - it's also about the way we do them; the work before us is as much about how we live, as what we do. Or, put another way, this is as much about culture as it is about plans.

And the diocesan plan for change and renewal has a section about the kind of culture we need if we're to become the kind of church we're called to be. And tucked away in that section are three words, which describe the 'how' of our life and work over the next few years; three words which describe elements of a culture.

And those three words are faithfulness, curiosity and mutuality.

And I want to unpack each of them as we continue our work in a season of change, as we give glory to our unchanging God.

Faithfulness is, I hope, straightforward. Before we do anything else, we need to be

faith-full - full of faith. Full of faith that God has given us everything we need to be the people he calls us to be. Full of faith that the God who was with the great characters of scripture, and with the great Celtic Saints and with those who passed the faith on to us, is still at work in the world today; full of faith in God's ongoing work of recreation, redemption and restoration.

And we need to be faithful to the things of God; in prayer, worship and the study of scripture; in service of neighbour and care for creation; in mission and evangelism.

Which is to say we need to be confident that God hasn't given up on his world or on us; and that he really is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Because in the end, we're not called to very much except to be faithful. We're not called to be busy, or to save the church - we're called to be faithful.

So as we go about the work of implementing plans and of sharing what we know of God with a world that so needs Good News, let's make sure we pray together, often; that we are talking about what God is up to, often; that we are sharing stories and questions and testimonies of God's goodness; that we are seeking his face in a broken and wounded world and, whenever and wherever we see Him, joining in with his work of love and mercy and grace.

We declare God's glory by being faithful.

The second word is **curiosity**. If God is real, which He is, then He is surely more interesting than anything else in the Universe. And so to be faithful is also to be curious - curious about what God's up to, about what his plans for the world are and how we're to join in; curious about the part that we - each of us - are to play.

And if we are curious about God, then we'll be curious about one another, and about the communities that we serve. Because we know - I hope - that God doesn't reveal his plans to any one of us alone, nor only to the church - he reveals his grace and truth to us together; us in our church communities and us as part of wider communities. And so we need to be curious about people and places, and we need to be very, very good at listening and paying attention to one another.

And it's not always easy being curious, because it requires us to pay attention and to give time. It means allowing the possibility - probability even - that someone else has a crucial part of God's truth for us to discover. It means having the humility to accept that none of us have all the answers.

And I think that has become harder since Covid. Something happened during those 2 difficult years, when our ability to listen to each other was diminished, and we - and I mean both wider society and us in the church - have become more fractious and less ready to listen. But if we want to live well in God's eternal now, faithful to yesterday and hopeful about tomorrow, all of it in the midst of so much change, we need to be world

experts at listening and paying attention; we need to be deeply curious about God and about each other.

Faithfulness, curiosity and third **mutuality**.

St Paul sometimes gets stuck for his dense writing style - but he was a master at coming up with images that explain his ideas in memorable ways. And one of his most powerful images is of the church as a body. Like a body, he says, the church needs eyes, hands and feet. And we need the eyes to do the work of eyes, and the hands to be hands and the feet to be feet. There's no point in a hand saying they can see better than an eye, nor a foot pretending it can do what a hand does. Each of us has a particular role to play and responsibility to carry.

But hands, eyes and feet also need each other. A body made up just of feet is not a body, nor is one made up just of hands or eyes. We each need to do what it's ours to do, and we have to do it together.

And that's as true for us here today as it was for the people of Corinth. We each have our own role to play and responsibilities to carry. And we take those seriously, expecting to carry what's ours to carry and to be accountable for it. And we need each other.

Parishes, deaneries, Church House, schools, pioneer projects, Lis Escop - each is needed, and each needs the other. Ordained and lay; Deacons, priests, bishops - each is needed, and each needs the other. Church Wardens, treasurers, evangelists, administrators, preachers, pastors, children's ministers, singers - each is needed, and each needs the other. You, me, us - we are all needed, and we all need each other.

Jonathan Sacks, who was Chief Rabbi before his death, wrote '*religion is the consecration of community*', by which he means that faith acknowledges that mutuality - our dependence upon one another - is holy.

If we want to be God's faithful people, curious about what He is up to in and amongst the communities of Cornwall, we need to acknowledge our mutual dependence upon each other - each of us responsible for the thing we're uniquely responsible for, together.

Faithfulness, curiosity and mutuality.

If we get those things right; if people who get to know us notice the depth of our faith, the quality of our curiosity and the commitment we have to one another, much of the rest; much of the practical work we have to do, will flow naturally.

The world has always changed, and it's certainly changing fast at the moment. But we know what we have to do, and we know how we need to go about it. Faithfulness, curiosity and mutuality will keep us true to our glorious God who was, is and is to come.

Glory to the father, and the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and shall be forever. Amen

Questions for discussion (without feedback)

- Where do you see signs of faithfulness, curiosity and mutuality in your context?
- Which one of them do you feel called to focus on over the next few months?