

## Presidential Address

“Now ....”

Simeon had been waiting for a long time; most of us know what the word to wait means. We do waiting and if we do waiting we also understand what the word ‘now’ means, if you have a partner, maybe a husband or a wife you would understand the meaning of the word ‘now’ as used in the phrase ‘I am ready now’ or ‘I am coming now’.

In other words the word now as with all words can take on a different meaning from its normal usage. Candlemass is about a meeting and a moment filled with richness. Waiting can so often be used to mean doing nothing, wasting time. To wait can seem an empty space or it can be very full, a time full of energy for example as people wait anxiously.

Simeon was a determined and clear thinking person he knew for what it was that he was waiting and he recognised it when it arrived. As well as knowing what waiting means and the various shades of meaning in the word now we also know what anxiety means. We don’t know whether Simeon was ever anxious as his waiting increased, as the time went by and the moment for which he was waiting, his particular ‘now’, still hadn’t materialised. We can speculate and of course that is what I am doing right now. I speculate and suggest that we all know what it is to be anxious, even if some more than others, and as well as individuals, it is also institutions that become anxious. The Church of England is an anxious institution; it gives evidence of that in numerous ways. It likes to believe it can control matters and organise everything and get everyone sorted and in the right order. It spends long periods talking to itself producing documents that appear to be in language that only the in crowd can understand. It worries endlessly about

what other people think of it and it takes a very long time before it makes any decisions at all.

I am of course an anxious individual myself, as all preachers I speak primarily to and of myself. And it is, you may be thinking an easy shot to criticise the institutions of which we are a part and which we know and love. And anyway here we are celebrating Candlemass. I am sure you will hear many fine sermons and expositions of this gospel tomorrow about Mary and Jesus being the Messiah and the meeting of Judaism and Christianity and the light of the world. What I really want to do for now and for us is to stay with the word 'now'.

Simeon was waiting, as of course we are all waiting. How do we experience waiting and what does that do to us? Waiting is not just wasting time we use the time as we wait to prepare and plan for what we do next. Planning is important and much of what is on our agenda today is about planning, the discussions and decisions we make today will not most of them be implemented immediately so it could be said of today that we will spent a lot of it waiting. Some of you may be anxious at the thought of waiting to speak in a particular debate, anxious about what you say or about what other people might say. Some may be anxious about conversations they know they want to have at lunch time or know they have to try and catch someone as part of today. Some may be anxious about how one of the debates will go whether the decision will go my way or not. Some may be anxious about quite other things happening in their lives today or tomorrow or that have just happened.

What does all that anxiety do to us and what does all that living in the future or the past do to us? The Presentation is about this moment this now being filled and being whole. "Your word has been fulfilled" It is of course pretty exhausting waiting all the time, being in a state of constant anxiety, in fact it's impossible to live our lives like that. So we don't, we find ways to either stop being anxious or stop waiting all together.

This morning we are going to hear something about childhood and what healthy childhood might look like. I don't know the content or indeed the process of the presentation but what I hope we will do is hear something about what it means to be a young person and we need to hear that. So often we assume or we think we know, it is too tiring to be anxious all the time so we rely on our assumptions and our presumptions and prejudices. Especially with regard to children and young people, I fear that as church we make constant mistakes, we act as if children are the church or the world of tomorrow or the world and the church of the past that is when we were children and young people and so we don't bother paying enough attention to what they might be saying now after all they are children and young people their time will come.

We need to listen to pay attention now and we need to listen carefully and with our whole selves – not as in yes I am listening that is rather the same as 'I am ready now.'

Part of that now and that being present is about the possibility that we will change in this moment and that what happens now will have some impact and effect on us.

A synod is a difficult event in which to imagine change happening in this present moment, now, because so much of what we do is about either reporting on what has been or planning for what will be. Another example, this afternoon we discuss the crucial question of deployment. No doubt there will be a number here who are anxious about that debate waiting for it to start wanting it to be now. Yet much of the substance is about how we plan and organise for tomorrow or indeed the day after tomorrow. Perhaps the message of Candlemass is to notice how we use this now and how we make present the reality of the incarnation now and not always be assuming we have time to prepare and to wait and to get even more anxious.

The other issue I want to highlight which is on our agenda today is the Sudan a country in which to talk of now and anxiety means something completely different to our talk of now and anxiety. I grow to learn that the generosity and willingness of the Sudanese to spend time with you comes partly from their lack of material possessions and also from a real sense that presence and time are valuable, precious commodities.

We this year have the privilege of hosting all the Sudanese bishops and their wives for a fortnight before Lambeth. There is much anxiety around about what Lambeth will or will not be about but I hope that having the bishops with us and ensuring they spend time in the deaneries and the parishes will give us a glimpse albeit a small one of a very different understanding of time and waiting and what now means. I hope we can learn from them and of course I hope that they may learn from us as well.

It is about mutual learning and teaching and being together in each others presence. That after all is what Simeon recognised in that moment as he held the baby. Now Lord your servant can go in peace. That moment was fulfilling and satisfying and rich in meaning. Simeon was present to our Lord and our Lord was present to Simeon. How can we try to ensure we lessen our anxieties this day, we prevent ourselves from thinking so much about what is to happen or what has happened that we miss this present moment this now. I hope spending time thinking and crucially listening about childhood will help us and will feed us and enable us to listen and to open ourselves to a different now, I hope the debate on deployment will in fact be a time of listening and sharing with each other and being present to each other as together we work to the same ends that of discovering the kingdom and sharing the gospel and bringing others to know Christ. I hope that Synod will feel able to be generous to our Sudanese visitors in ways that we can so that they can be generous to us in ways that they can so

that they can teach us about now and being present and that we can receive such profound lessons.

For Simeon the waiting was over, the present moment brought fulfilment and salvation and real presence. Dare we live in this moment, can we lessen our anxieties a little so that we can pay attention to what God is saying to us in this moment and enable this synod to be a rich and fulfilling time in which we are present to each other and we are aware of God's presence with us.