

2015 21 February Diocesan Synod: Presidential Address

Luke 5:27-32

After this he went out and saw a tax-collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up, left everything, and followed him.

Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax-collectors and others sitting at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?' Jesus answered, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.'

Renewing Hope

I am very much enjoying visiting every Deanery between Epiphany and Easter to talk about Renewing Hope: Pray, Serve, Grow. Attendance has been excellent. So far I have met with over 1400 people in the 13 Deaneries. Thank you to everyone who has helped plan these, especially the Rural Deans and Lay Chairs, but also everyone who has given an evening to this and to the addressing the challenges: What do you pray for? Whom do you serve? How will you grow?

In each meeting after reading the scriptures and a prayer I ask what has renewed your hope in the last few weeks. Let's do it. (3 or 4 mins)

There is always a buzz. We don't find it hard to identify things that have renewed our hope. It is part of creating a culture in which we recognise that God is renewing our hope and transforming lives, that there are many blessings in this life and there is much to give thanks for. Everywhere people have given at least of one difficult event which was faced well and has been the cause of thanksgiving in the renewal of hope. Back in early January in Sherborne Deanery these included the way the French responded to the Charlie Hebdo killings. More recently in Marlborough someone talked about the way the Archbishops have drawn attention to the inequality of wealth and the needs of the poorest in this country. On Thursday in Wimborne one person had just come back from South Sudan. She spoke about how people with very little materially renew *our* hope through *their* faith.

We know through our experience that difficult things faced well renew hope. On several occasions people have told stories about deaths. The Christian faith began at an empty tomb and the care of the dying and of the dead has been a consistent Christian from earliest times.

Andrew Johnson RIP

Diocesan Synod is meeting the day after Andrew Johnson's funeral. Andrew grew up in the Diocese and had been our Diocesan Registrar since 1997. He was a kind and pastoral lawyer, widely perceived as one of the best and most experienced of Registrars in the Church of England. He was also a Church musician. Almost every church we went to he would tell a story about who got married there and what music he had organised for them. A choir of 80 sang at his funeral in Fordingbridge. For reasons I find hard to fathom in such a committed Wiltshire and Salisbury man, he and Sally had strayed to live just over the border in Hampshire and the Diocese of Winchester where Andrew had much more recently become their Registrar as well. Nearly 600 people attended his funeral. The Bishop of Winchester presided, I did the Commendation and Bishop David Stancliffe read the Gospel. For many of us Andrew was a friend as well as colleague. Our hearts go out to Sally and their family. He will be remembered at Evensong in our cathedral on Saturday 2nd May at 5.30pm.

Andrew had begun to prepare for his retirement and was developing a team capable of taking over his duties. The need for this has happened earlier than anyone could have expected but I am grateful for the way that Sue de Candole has stepped up to the role of Acting Registrar and Acting Bishop's Legal Officer. Patricia Russell continues as Deputy Registrar. The Registry team is now all female, which we think is another Salisbury first, shared, of course, with Winchester.

Bishop Graham

Bishop Graham is unable to be with us today. He is in New York meeting with people about his new post as Mission Theologian in the Anglican Communion. From July 2015 he will be working in a creative partnership of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Church Mission Society and Durham University. I am very grateful for all that Bishop Graham has contributed as Bishop of Sherborne to the Diocese of Salisbury. In addition to his responsibilities across Dorset, he has chaired the Mission Council, the Diocesan Communications group, our Sudan Partnership and been Warden of LLM's.

Many have begun to say how much they will miss him but we all recognise that this new post is made for him and makes very good use of his experience, knowledge and skills. As a Diocese we will give thanks for him and Alison on Sunday 19th April at Cathedral Evensong at 4.30pm and ask God's blessing on them and all that lies ahead. The timing of this will allow him a sabbatical between finishing here and starting in his new post.

Those who would like to contribute to a leaving gift are asked to send cheques made payable to 'Salisbury DBF' (marked 'Bishop of Sherborne' on the back) to Phil Musselwhite at the Diocesan Office, 99 Crane Street, Salisbury SP1 2QB.

Wanted: a new Archdeacon of Dorset and a new Bishop of Sherborne

Following Stephen Waine's appointment as Dean of Chichester we will be advertising next week for a new Archdeacon of Dorset. We hope to make an appointment by the beginning of May to start later in the summer. To appoint a new Bishop will take longer. I am required to consult the Diocese before notifying the Archbishop and the Dioceses Commission of my intention to appoint a new bishop. This will take us well into the summer. If an appointment is approved it will be the Autumn before a new bishop is announced. January looks the earliest we could expect to have a new bishop. If the post matters, and it does, this process and timetable is complete madness.

It means that the Archdeacon of Sherborne is going to be working exceptionally hard, just as the Archdeacon of Sarum had to do so in my first year here with no Bishop of Ramsbury and Archdeacon of Wilts.

As with a parish vacancy, it will need everyone to step up to the mark, especially the Rural Deans, Lay Chairs and those who are working in the areas that were +Graham's responsibilities.

If "That which doesn't kill us is good for us", we are likely to find some unexpected blessings and opportunities.

Luke 5:27-32

Today's Gospel reading is Luke's account of the call of Levi, the tax collector. The call to discipleship is becoming the latest integrative way of thinking about the Christian life. The various Task Groups initiated by the Archbishop are to get us to think, pray and act in new ways. Discipleship is not exactly new but there is a sense in which we are being asked to re-examine what it means for us to be followers of Christ and to bring others to Christ. *And* it is beyond our control. The call of disciples in the New Testament is often sudden and interrupts daily life and business: "Follow me". The call of Levi the tax collector is a cracker. Tax collectors were not popular. Now it's the non-tax-payers. That night Levi gave a great banquet for Jesus in his house. The Scribes and Pharisees – who were good religious people - complained about Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners.

It is a good reminder near the beginning of Lent about the company kept by Jesus. If we don't have the equivalents in our churches we would have a problem. Indeed, the process of self-examination in Lent makes us realise we are the equivalents of characters like these.

The Bishops' Pastoral Letter about the General Election

Those who have seen the letter from the Bishops for the General Election as an attack on politicians have mis-read it, or perhaps not even read it. The letter does not tell people what to think about this policy or that, or how to vote; but the privileges of living in a democracy mean that we should use our votes thoughtfully, prayerfully and with the good of others in mind, not just our own interests.

As bishops we support policies which respect the natural environment, enhance human dignity and honour the image of God in our neighbour.... (Para 2)

Pursuing the common good is a Christian obligation and is expressed in how we approach our role as voters as much as in our personal priorities. We belong together in a creation which should be cherished and not simply used and consumed. (Para 5)

The letter encourages us to identify and talk about the big issues – such as the role of the state and the way we belong together. The letter suggests that in our own country we have become a ‘society of strangers’, people who live in parallel rather than the connected lives of people who belong together. I think we are struggling to give an account of what it means for us to be English, British, European *and* Global citizens? The letter is entitled, ‘Who is my Neighbour?’ It is the question asked by the lawyer in Luke’s Gospel who wanted to justify himself and prompted Jesus to tell the story of the Good Samaritan. It is a story about the despised outsider being the person who teaches good religious people how to be disciples who love God and love our neighbour as ourselves.

Renewing Hope: Pray, Serve, Grow

The call of Levi the tax collector and the story to illustrate ‘Who is my neighbour’ are helpful touchstones at a time when the Church is seeking to renew itself through the work of a series of Task Groups. There is a connection between the national, Diocesan and local agendas but we all need to remember that in this Christian life so-called ‘successful’ churches have as many questions to ask of themselves as those that appear to be less ‘successful’.

When we face difficult things honestly and well our hope is renewed. One of the things that have heartened me in the last few weeks is the way people are working with Renewing Hope. The conversations and responses are deepening in very thoughtful ways. I am confident there is something very good moving in this Diocese and thank God for the creative partnerships that characterise the life of the Church which seeks to Pray, Serve, Grow in the life of the risen Christ.