

**Sermon Preached by the Bishop of Truro,  
The Rt Revd Tim Thornton  
On the occasion of his Enthronement  
Truro Cathedral  
Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

*"But immediately Jesus spoke to them, Take heart, it is I do not be afraid." Matt 14 v. 27*

What will I say and not say? What will I make of this opportunity? I am tempted to use the text from Revelation 'there was silence in heaven for half an hour.' I am anxious about you, and this, and I suspect that some of you are nervous about what I am going to say - or perhaps not; I know the clergy from Salisbury will have taken guesses about the length of this sermon!

Anxiety, if not to say, fear, is very much in the air in this country, in the world and sadly, sometimes in the church.

The most often used words spoken by Jesus in the gospels are 'Do not be afraid'. We shouldn't be anxious, we should be confident in our faith. I am excited at the prospect of taking on the role of being your Bishop, the Bishop of Truro, and of course daunted by the scope of the work. I understand a key task which I have is to help build confidence, and to encourage us all to take risks for the sake of the gospel, yet at the same time always staying focused on Jesus. We are disciples; it's only by following Him that we will have the courage not to be fearful, and to dare to live out the gospel imperative to enjoy our lives and relate to others as mature Christian disciples. For we are loved by God, loved by God : you and me!

First let me say some thanks. We are a Eucharistic people; I am sure you all start your prayers by saying thank you.

Sian and I are delighted to be here and want to say thank you to all of you for your very warm welcome; it's an exciting occasion, as we gather from the very different parts of this county and

beyond to worship God and look to the future with hope, expectation and imagination. Cornwall, they tell me, is a different place. I look forward to learning about that difference and celebrating it.

Thank you also to Bishop Roy, for his episcopal oversight during the vacancy and to my senior colleagues for their welcome, hard work and all that they, and all of you in your different ways, have continued to do since Bill announced his retirement. I know what a hard act I have to follow and I am very grateful to Bill and to all my predecessors for their care, dedication and guardianship of the faith.

It's very appropriate to begin my public ministry celebrating the feast of the patron saint of Cornwall, Piran, about whom very little fact is known. We don't know exactly where he came from; allegedly he arrived on a millstone, from across the water: God enabling the millstone to float. You may well be asking about me, Where do I come from? (literally and metaphorically) Where is my millstone and significantly - what am I going to do with it?

I want to say thank you also to this Cathedral and its entire staff, especially for all their hard work to prepare for this service; our mother church here in this Diocese plays a crucial role in mission and ministry.

Thank you also to all from the civic, charity and business worlds; we are partners in many different fields, and I pledge myself to work with you to discover how we can build stronger communities. Communities that can withstand the present frightening financial situation, and move forward as lively and faithful communities creating indeed 'One Cornwall' (as you might say).

It's highly significant that the motto for Cornwall is 'One and All'. We have a duty to ensure that in building communities we include everyone. We need always to try to make certain that the

marginalised, and those so easily forgotten and pushed to the edge - if not indeed right outside - are given a voice. They are part of the 'all' and we need to work as partners, so that 'One' does indeed include 'All'.

Thank you also to the clergy and to their families earnestly labouring in the vineyard daily. It can, at times, seem a thankless task doing what you know God has called you to do. It has become more difficult for all of us clergy as we, the church, are battered by storms without and within. I pledge myself to work with all the clergy to renew and reinvigorate our calling to be servants of word and sacrament; to be signs and symbols of the glorious God; rediscovering, where we have lost it, the sense of fun that is crucial to our calling.

Thank you also to the Readers of the Diocese, who give your time and talents sacrificially for the sake of the Gospel. I pledge to work with you also to discover what it means to be the people of God living out the calling of our discipleship.

To the parishes, a word of special thanks to the churchwardens, lay worship leaders, pastoral assistants and others who have come here from parishes and communities up and down Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and those parts of Devon within the Diocese, for all that you do to maintain the life of the church to such a high standard. You are the people of God and I pledge myself to work with you to maintain and grow the church and discover the kingdom. There will be many surprises and challenges, and it will involve risk. Yet we need to take risks for the sake of the gospel.

Thank you also to our ecumenical partners, and especially our Methodist friends for sharing your building here in Truro with us this afternoon. The Gospel imperative is to be one; and yet we go on proving effectively that we find it impossible to work together. What a strange paradox that is! I know that we are all, understandably, becoming more fearful about the future of our

denominations. The temptation is to raise the drawbridge and bother only about ourselves. I pledge myself to work with you; and I would say to our ecumenical partners: "Please challenge me, if you see me becoming too fearful and inward looking." We have to work together and be prepared to give things up for the sake of the gospel.

Thank you also to the representatives of other faiths here. We share a common concern; it's getting harder for the voice of the faith communities to be heard. I pledge to work with people of faith to ensure that we can speak up and speak out, and that we are not discriminated against because of our beliefs.

A special word of thanks too, to Bishop Hans Eric of Strangnas, it's sad that Bishop Mlibo from Umzimvubu, our partner Diocese in South Africa is not able here, but yesterday I received a marvellous message of encouragement from Bishop Mlibo. Thank you Hans Eric, your presence highlights the dangers of another potential fear: that we only consider ourselves and don't have the imagination to keep our vision broad. We need to think local and act global but it is important at the same time that we think global and act local. I pledge to work with you of our partner Dioceses, to keep our vision broad and to keep Truro aware of its place in the universal church and wider world.

There is, of course, always the problem in thanking people, that you ignore someone or some group feels left out, but I am more intrigued today by a different problem.

There are many who aren't here. Some because they couldn't make it, but wanted to be, some simply because we couldn't fit everyone in. Some, in fact the vast majority, are not here because it would never cross their minds to be here. They haven't a clue about what is happening here. They don't know what a bishop is. The church, as we know, is invisible to large sections of our

community. And that means not only the young, but perhaps especially them.

How can we ensure when we speak about including people, and having one gospel for all, and being part of one Cornwall, that we listen to the voices of those who are *not* here and do *not* know, do not want to know what we are on about and never want to learn our language? I pledge myself to move beyond the walls of the church and churchiness wherever possible, always listening to what is being said and engaging with the wider community.

In other words not only mission but evangelism is a priority. We need to get out of the ghettos in which we so easily place ourselves and listen to others and share our message with them. We need to make sure our churches are places of welcome, and that they are attractive communities that others want to join.

Jesus said 'Do not be afraid'. How we need to hear and receive those words today! We live in fearful times. Living during a recession is enough reason to be anxious. We also live when it's increasingly difficult for people of faith to make their voice heard. The prevailing agenda of the so called developed world suggests religion and particularly Christianity has had its day.

It is also true that some of us who have faith, display a growing crisis of confidence and seem unable or unwilling to articulate our faith in the face of perceived criticism.

So what does it mean not to be afraid? What is the calling of the church here in the Diocese of Truro as *you* get to know a new bishop and *I* face up to the challenge I have just received to proclaim afresh the gospel in this generation?

The stilling of the storm is a passage the regional church leaders considered at their recent retreat. We were reminded that it has been interpreted allegorically. The boat in the story is the church and the sea is the world. That gives an interesting picture: Do we

stay in the boat navigating as best we can across a troubled sea, or do we jump into the water and see what happens?

There are many reasons why we can be fearful both in the sea (the world) and in the boat (the church). The world situation is frightening and often language of storms is used to describe it. The financial crisis is causing people to lose their jobs, their homes, and to be concerned about the future. Deeper than that, what is happening around us is making people think about how they shape their lives and by what values they order them. We have something to say at such a time. But of course the reality is that we in the church often build on the same foundations and make the same assumptions as everyone else.

In fact worse than that, the Cof E can appear as an anxious organisation, in fact it often seems that we make a speciality of anxiety. We seem to delight in wallowing in fear and anxiety. We like nothing better than a crisis so that we can say, 'I told you so', and prove once again what a mess we are in. Such anxiety often leads to paralysis.

A key word in the gospels is '*kairos*' it means 'this moment', 'now', but it's not a word most denominations really understand or use – and certainly not the Cof E. We only know the word "when we have considered all the options and set up the requisite committees and heard the necessary reports, and considered at length and carefully, and then we might just be able to say possibly - or then again probably not – let's put it on the agenda for the next meeting".

Jesus, who interestingly was not with the disciples in the boat on the Sea of Galilee, said to Peter 'It is I; have no fear' and then invited Peter to step out of the boat. How risky was that! We are disciples of Jesus, the Son of God. He always goes before us; we are his followers.

Jesus won for us the victory. Lent is a long season; it ends in the triumph of Easter. We are an Easter people, a joyful people. We shouldn't do anxious. We should do joy.

Let us therefore be more militant, saying loud and clear 'We have a gospel to proclaim'. It's the good news that we are not alone, we don't need to be afraid.

Let us take risks for the sake of the kingdom. As Peter strode out on the water he was doing fine until he took his eyes away from Jesus. We need to keep our eyes on Him. Dare to step outside the boat and head towards Jesus. Say your prayers and keep your eyes focused on Him.

Remember those who aren't here. We need to shape our language and behaviour to ensure we spend time not being too anxious about ourselves but speaking the word of God so that others will want to join in the conversation.

Show in your lives the joy that comes from knowing Christ has won the victory.

Be prepared to cry and laugh with others and take risks for the sake of the gospel.

Dare to believe that we, here in Cornwall, following in the footsteps of the many great saints like Piran, have achieved, and can go on achieving, great things and will do so in the name of the one who keeps telling us not to be afraid.

We, fellow pilgrims, can be confident in our faith. We need to speak out in the face of the storms that beset us. We need to speak out, and speak up, so that the world can hear again the message that God is here and that God love us.

God loves you and God loves me.