

**Ephesians Chapter 4 vv 7 - 16**

It is good to be here, I have been really excited about this meeting for a long time. We are the people who shape the church in this diocese now, and into the future, how exciting is that! We will equip the saints to build up the church and we are those who, together, will help each other become mature in our discipleship.

I do want to encourage all of us here to take part in this process which is crucial in shaping our future. At a time when institutions and democratic institutions especially are under such scrutiny and threat and people are so sceptical about the processes of governance, it is vital that we make proper use of the way we consult one another and make decisions. This means making it clear that I do want to use the synodical process and do want to allow space and time for people to say their piece, and for us not only to speak the truth in love, but also learn to listen to each other carefully, prayerfully and sensitively.

I come here to listen and to work with you to ensure that together we discover God's kingdom and grow the church. As Paul states in that passage from Ephesians each of us has gifts. I am delighted to take on the initiative started back in 2001 when in this diocese you set out to explore what it means to be the People of God and that it seems to me is at the heart of what we do here. We are striving to be mature Christian disciples; and as Paul makes clear, we only become mature when we recognise our need for one another, as the African saying has it 'I am me because you are you'. This meeting is called synod: the word itself indicates that this process is about doing things *together* so that together we can discern the right way forward. 'Syn' 'odos' going on the way together.

I have deliberately asked for a significant part of today to be spent in small groups which I know will make some groan, but I do think it is important that we listen to each other and rediscover a sense of trust and confidence in our common faith. So we will begin this afternoon with a short time of bible study looking at the Ephesians extract and then move on to discuss our priorities and what we think the priorities of the diocese should be. I recognise that Truro wasn't built in a day and so I hope to make use of synod meetings to ensure we give everyone a voice and an opportunity to be heard. It is especially important to do this when we face, as we do, significant pressures relating to finance but also and more significantly to the reality that the majority of Cornwall is totally unaware of what we are about, and for what we stand, as we meet here today. The figures are clear: we have been losing large numbers of worshippers and our confirmation numbers are not huge. We therefore need as a matter of urgency to rediscover our enthusiasm for the gospel and our ability to communicate the gospel values to others.

We need to inspire others with the vision that we surely have, which is to make mature Christian disciples and discover God's kingdom and grow the church. Sadly it is not always the case that people feel inspired by the church today and it is even

true that sometimes a meeting of Diocesan Synod is not greeted with enthusiasm by all who have to attend! I would like to thank you all for you have done and given over the last triennium and hope that some of you at least will allow yourselves to go forward for election for the new Synod. We need an active synod which owns the decisions it is asked to make and which is a key part of our work in communicating the Gospel throughout this diocese.

As we look ahead I am glad that the Dean is going to be telling us something about the **Inspire Cornwall** project that is being launched this weekend from the Cathedral. It is very encouraging to see such an imaginative series of projects being launched, and I hope you will agree when you have seen the presentation, that this is something we can wholeheartedly support and that diocese and cathedral can work together to shape our vision . We do need to inspire and be inspired, and in the Cathedral, our mother church, we have a wonderful example of how we can and should best use our resources, both to connect rightly with our history and our identity and also to explore how to work with a wide range of partners to shape the future of our county.

One of the elements of the Inspire Cornwall project is that of **the environment**: the environment around the Cathedral and how we relate in general to our environment. If you talk to any group of young people about what issues are important to them then I suspect the environment will be in their top three. Many young people are enthusiastic campaigners for the future of our planet and keen to point out how wasteful and polluting we humans are. It is very important for us to take the environment seriously. As Christians we are stewards of creation and we have been given such an amazing gift by God, we do need to demonstrate our care and concern for it. It is therefore important that we as a diocese ensure we take our responsibilities seriously. To this end we, the diocese, are planning to create an environmental policy not just to ensure that we tick the right boxes, but to encourage all of us to change the way we live, and challenge the habits to which we have become accustomed. I want to ask as many of you as possible to take away with you the packs for your own parishes and maybe, dare I suggest, you might take packs for neighbouring parishes as well. In the pack are copies of a leaflet which asks for parishes to send in examples of good practice that are already happening or planned in relation to environmental initiatives. I know that a great deal is taking place and there are many good, sometimes small and not costly but easy to implement ideas around the county. We hope to gather these together and then in November the plan is to debate a policy for the diocese which will therefore not only be words but will be able to be backed up with action and can make a difference.

Making a difference is something that we ought to do as a matter of course, given that we are disciples of Jesus Christ. Again as St Paul writes to the Ephesians 'our task is to grow towards maturity and to grow up into the full stature of Jesus Christ'. It is of course a very ambitious task. Paul was nothing if not ambitious and we too should be ambitious for the sake of the gospel. I believe we do need to raise our expectations

of each other, and also encourage each other in our discipleship and our mission and ministry. That is again why it is so good and exciting to be here with you today. We are the body of Christ, we are God's people, we are those who say 'yes' to God in our lives; our way of life shows that day by day. As we discuss this afternoon I think we will of course come up with many good examples of how we live out our discipleship, and how we can together discover God's kingdom and grow the church. Naturally our discussion is set against the gloomy financial situation and the increasing pressures we are all feeling in our daily lives. I do understand how complicated and difficult the next few years are going to be, and we need to be realistic and honest about what all of that will mean.

What I believe it means for us is that we need to be clear that we will have to make some hard choices about what we can afford to do as diocese. It would be lovely to do everything and of course everything is in some ways a priority, but surely a mature way forward - given the reality of what we are facing - is to make those hard decisions. In that way we need to work together to highlight what are indeed priorities.

We need to display in our lives gospel values, and as I read that passage from Ephesians I would suggest there are some obvious values that underlie what Paul writes and how he communicates.

Firstly we need to build our **confidence** up. We are an Easter people and we have much about which we can and should give thanks, and there is much that we can and should do. We need to find our voice as people of faith, and use that voice in what is a noisy world; the fear I have is that we have stopped speaking into that noise.

A second key value is that we do things together and we need each other. God reveals to us that **interdependence** is at the heart of the Godhead, God as Trinity, three persons in one God. That is a mystery. It is an equal mystery to me that so often in church life we seem to display the opposite values, and for all sorts of reasons, some fairly straightforward, some truly mysterious, we cannot work with each other. Never mind across parish boundaries: even within the same parish we often find it difficult and unpalatable to build each other up and to speak the truth in love. Again we need to raise expectations, and to recognise that we are called to be the body of Christ and all the ligaments and bits and pieces are joined together whether we like it or not. I am sure part of the way forward for us in this diocese has to be exploring new ways (which ironically will often be very traditional ways) of being and doing church, and I hope that you might talk about some of them and what that might mean this afternoon.

A third key value is **service**: we are called to be there for others. A key element of life in the Church of England is that we understand we are there for all people whoever they are and whatever their background. Sadly it can appear again as if we are only in fact interested in ourselves and appear to spend far too much time talking to ourselves. We need to work hard at the ministry of welcome, and also, as I

said in the Cathedral on the 7<sup>th</sup> March, we need to be prepared to take risks and to go beyond the walls of the church buildings.

Finally, a fourth important value for us to consider is how we are stewards: that is not only how we take our part in the care and nurture of God's creation; nor only about money and resources - though they are two important aspects of **stewardship**. I would say it is even more about a word that is in vogue at the moment and that is *accountability*. How do we hold each other to account for the discipleship we display and live out? St Paul is keen both to stress the interdependence of the whole people of God and also to encourage the disciples to be open with each other. So in this passage he encourages them not to be blown about by every new wind but also to speak the truth in love, so that we might indeed grow into the full stature of Christ. Now that is some aim! I think we need to work harder at what stewardship means, and especially at what it means to be accountable to one another under God.

So I am excited to be here, at Diocesan Synod, a key meeting of those who have the best interests of the diocese at heart. I urge you to take your discipleship seriously, and encourage you to grow into mature disciples so that together we might discover the kingdom and grow the church. I believe we need to be more courageous at showing in our lives the core values of what it means to be a Christian; those key values of *confidence*, God has won the victory for us, and *interdependence* - we cannot do things on our own. Our God reveals we can only become fully who we are with others so remember *service*: we are there for people and we need to ensure we are an outward facing church; and finally *stewardship*: our God is generous. How generous are we and how accountable are we to each other?

I want to end with a quotation from Archbishop Rowan which he used during the retreat addresses at the Lambeth Conference last year. He himself was quoting from an American theologian William Stringfellow. "A *religious* person knows the words and the habits that satisfy religious demands, and can make a very time-consuming hobby or pastime of being religious. A *biblical* person is one caught in the spotlight of God's call and God's attention, called to obedience, called to danger, to transformed life. A religious person is perhaps a calm and relaxed person, knowing exactly what to do. A biblical person is very frightened. I'm not suggesting that the essence of being a good bishop is to be very frightened, though sometimes it does us good to be - but that to be a bishop is to be a *biblical person*, caught in the spotlight of God's attention, God's call, working out our future with fear and trembling because it's only when we know something of the fear of being caught in the spotlight of God's attention that we know the meaning of the words, 'Fear not!', which Jesus Christ addresses to his disciples." We are all called to be Biblical people to use Stringfellow's phrase; that is to be caught in the spotlight of God's call and God's attention. Called to obedience, called to danger, called to transformed life.