

**Address by the Bishop of Truro,
The Rt Revd Tim Thornton
to Diocesan Synod
Saturday 19 September 2009**

Who can learn the counsel of God? (Wisdom)

So therefore none of you can become my disciples unless you give up all your possessions (Luke)

Firstly, I want to say a very big thank you to you all for being here and for having allowed your names to go forward to be elected or nominated on to Diocesan Synod. I regard this body as very important indeed and I hope and pray that together we will forge a way forward for the Church of England here in this diocese. A key role for us is to work together to decide how we can use our resources to do what God wants us to do.

Of course we first need to decide what God wants us to do but I also want to suggest there is something we need to do before we decide that and I hope that today is structured in the right way to show our priorities. We need first to recognise and accept that we are nothing without God. As Creator, God is the ground of who we are. 'God is our being' as the author of the classic *The Cloud of Unknowing* writes and that is why it is right for us to begin with worship and a recognition that we are not God, which I know is not always easy for all of us to accept!

I do intend to listen carefully to what you as members of Synod have to say and want to assure you that I hope we will use synod meetings to listen to each other and to debate. We are grown ups, God wants us to be mature and so having debate and disagreeing is not a bad thing and yes, even voting and making decisions, is part of who we are as we grapple with the difficulties set before us; and there will no doubt be some difficult issues over the next three years.

But for today I believe we need to keep focussed on discerning what God wants us to do and to be. As Bishop I understand I have been given some responsibility to lead. Certainly from those who asked things of their new bishop before I arrived they clearly said on your behalf (and without many of you perhaps knowing it) that you wanted someone to come and give a lead. So my vision as I pray and travel around the diocese is that the generous God invites us to discover the kingdom and grow the church, for we are the people of God.

Of course there are enormous financial pressures on us as there are on all bodies at present and we will have some very difficult decisions to make as we consider the budget. However as we prepare for the Road Shows around the deaneries this year I want to say loud and clear that we must be generous in return to the God who is incredibly and unremittingly generous to us; and as I see the figures our regular churchgoers are not all as generous as they might be at present. So we need to excite them with the vision of this generous God and encourage them to be a part of this visionary, risky, dynamic, growing church that is the Diocese of Truro responding to the generous God who tells his little flock not to be afraid as he is giving them his kingdom (Luke chapter 12 verse 32).

Secondly I want to say a very big thank you to our guests who have joined us today, to the Mayor thank you for your hospitality and your warm greetings.

Sadly Steve Wild cannot be with us as he and I were double booked; we were both supposed to be in Bude opening an exhibition as well as here. Celia Philips who is the Methodist representative on our Executive also sadly cannot be with us today. I am very pleased to welcome David Grosch-Miller the Moderator of the URC South West Synod and the Chairman of Churches Together in Cornwall who has agreed to step in at fairly short notice. It is good to have David with us and very important for us to welcome our ecumenical colleagues and friends, and for us to consider how we can and should work together. For example, our covenant with the Methodist church is very important. It is perhaps still unclear how we can and should take it forward and I fear we are in danger in both our churches of allowing external pressures, not least financial ones, to stop us from thinking and working together as we should. I am delighted that tomorrow Steve will be made an Ecumenical Canon in the cathedral and I hope you will all pray for him and for our brothers and sisters in the Methodist church especially tomorrow. The covenant we are in is a sign of how we can and should work together and recognise the importance of others. It can show the way our diverse society works precisely because of difference. Those who are different can and should complement one another rather than oppose each other.

I want to say thank you to Lady Mary, our Lord Lieutenant, as always it is a great pleasure that you are with us. Since I have arrived in Cornwall Mary has been a tremendous support to Sian and myself and I have been impressed, as I know you all are, with the way she gives of herself unstintingly to the life of Cornwall and her ebullience, care, attention and energy are exceptional.

Thank you also to Kevin Lavery, who as a Newcastle supporter is happier than he was, but as Chief Executive of Cornwall Council does have one or two reasons why we need to keep him in our prayers. It is very good of you to give your time today Kevin and we do regard you as a very important partner and I want to say a little more about that in a moment. I do know and understand, as I hope we all here do, that having the sort of role that Kevin has is not easy. Kevin is always able to be criticised by everyone and is in one of those positions in which if things go right no one notices but if anything goes wrong we all know where he lives!

So, Kevin thank you for being with us and for your hospitality in hosting us today. I have enjoyed my visits here for a range of meetings and do want to work with you in a wide variety of ways.

All of which leads me to my final point as we meet today for this first meeting of the new triennium and look around and try and get to know each other. We meet of course at a time when there is much gloom and doom and talk of recession in the world and within the church there is much gloom and doom and talk of splits and a very uncertain future. Bishop Roy and I have just returned from a meeting of the College of Bishops, that is all the bishops of the Church of England. It was a very encouraging meeting not least because we were addressed by various people, some of whom were decidedly not members of the church, who told us how important the church is and what an important role it plays.

I am disappointed when we seem to believe our own publicity and turn inwards on ourselves and spend all our time navel gazing and do not take up the extraordinary opportunities that our generous God gives us to encounter one another and share our story with others.

I would want to share with you one amazing insight that I heard one of the speakers share with us.

He pointed out, surprise of surprises, that we live in a society that works. Do you realise that two thirds of children live in homes in which there are two parents living together. So often we are given that statistic the other way round, one third of children are in, as they are sometimes called, broken

homes. But we live in a society that works and is not broken down. We don't leave this meeting to go out to trouble torn, riot filled streets, as the Mayor of Truro has rightly assured us!

Living as we do in a society that works, we sometimes forget all the good things and sadly our focus is taken by the national media which of course is a reflection at some level of ourselves who tell us that we are living in a dysfunctional society.

Our country works because people do care for each other even when sometimes they don't realise they are doing so. For example, we pay our taxes and so those of us who have some resources share them with others especially those who have little or nothing. Much of our infrastructure works and today it is very good to have Kevin with us to share with us something of the vision and hard work that Cornwall Council are undertaking to ensure that we continue to live in a society that works. It is always good to have Lady Mary with us and we look forward to what she has to say to us and her presence again reminds us that we are part of a country that works and in which our symbolic representatives play a very important part. Our Lord Lieutenant has a very good overview of the large number of people in Cornwall who give freely and generously of their time and talents to work for others and for the sake of the common good.

The speaker in Oxford went on to make the even more amazing point that our society works because it is based on values taken from the Christian gospel! We live in a Christian country and we seem to have forgotten that fact and have stopped pointing out to people how fundamental to our way of living our values are.

I hope you can be encouraged by that: you may well be very surprised, as I was, to even contemplate it! We are so easily stuck in a mindset that says all is going wrong and we are all doomed. But that is not the Christian gospel. We need to listen again to the wisdom of God not our own wisdom. We need to become disciples of Jesus Christ not disciples of our own views or those of any particular part of our society. In order to become disciples we have to learn to give away our possessions. In other words let go of so many preconceived notions that we have and give up so much that we hold dear and be released to allow God to speak to us and through us.

As we meet together as Synod we have a lot to decide and much to discuss. Let us keep before us the vision that God is the ground of our being and that God is generous and invites us to discover the kingdom and grow the church, for we are the people of God.