

**Address by the Bishop of Truro,
The Rt Revd Tim Thornton
To Diocesan Synod
Saturday 14 November 2009**

There is no mention of rights in the Bible but there are many references to responsibilities. Our Synod today concentrates on responsibilities in a variety of ways.

We began of course with worship recognising our responsibility to God which is the only place Christians can and should begin.

We are about to show our responsibility to the wider world in our debates on the environment and taking note of our part in caring for God's creation.

We will continue to show our responsibility for one another, and in particular for some of those who work for the church, as we debate clergy retirement housing. This debate is of course not only about the provision of housing for clergy who are retired but also - and I suspect this will come out in the debate - it includes discussion about the whole package of care for those who work for the church. How they are and should be remunerated, and how we value and show that we value each other.

We also continue to express our concern for responsibility in the way that we care for one another in the debate on the budget, which of course is not only about facts and figures and finance but is underpinned by our understanding of who we are as church and the reality that we are interdependent, and that we need one another truly to become the body of Christ, the people of God. As I stressed at the road shows *We are Diocese*; we need to give evidence through how we are and what we do that we are all part of the one body; again I hope that will be evident in our debate on the budget.

Taking our responsibilities seriously is a key part of growing up. When we are children and act childishly we don't have any responsibility and believe that we don't need to care or think about others. As we grow and develop and mature a sign of that growth and maturity is that we do understand that we have responsibilities and that we need to care for others and not just ourselves.

So I believe today's synod is all about our Christian discipleship and what it means to be mature Christian disciples. As we move towards the Copenhagen conference I am sure that we as Christians should take a lead in promoting the cause of the whole world and proclaiming the importance of caring for all of God's creation. Whatever our view on climate change and the science behind it, I believe it is a clear Christian duty for us to be concerned about the future of our world, God's world, and the reality of life in those parts of the world that too easily get forgotten or marginalised. We need to provide a voice for the voiceless. Even though it may not feel like it for some of us, we still have so much compared to many people throughout our world, God's world. Today gives us an important opportunity to speak out on behalf of others and to stand in solidarity alongside our brothers and sisters. All too often we can be criticised for being short-sighted or narrow minded as an organisation and only concerned for our own future or for maintaining what has been and therefore always should be. We have a key imperative as Christians to be involved in mission and that is *missio dei* - God's mission. So we today can stand up and speak out on behalf of other people.

And as I make the point can I also remind all synod members that this Sunday Nov 15th is the start of **UK Inter Faith Week** and the Cornwall Faith Forum is meeting on Monday 16th at 7.30pm with refreshments from 7pm in the cathedral refectory to consider Faith and Health/Well-Being Issues and everyone is welcome. And on Sunday November 15th at 2pm also in the cathedral chapter house there is an Interfaith Celebration organised by the United Nation Association.

As I talk about responsibility I would like to conclude by reminding all members of synod new and old of our shared responsibility here today. We are about to have a series of debates; some people have been invited to speak and we also have some invited guests here whom I am delighted to welcome, but I hope and trust there will be time to listen to many of the members of synod and I encourage you to consider speaking. The idea of today is that we should be honest and responsible as Christians, members of the body of Christ listening to one another and talking, sharing our views and then deciding what we want to do.

I do hope and pray that synod members will feel able and enabled to take part in the debates today. We do want to hear your voice and just as we are dioceses so we are synod. Your contribution is important, significant - indeed crucial.

This synod is about all of us striving to understand what God is saying to us. No single one of us has the monopoly on the right answers - so it is not surprising that the Bible does not talk about rights.

Some of the most difficult issues in the environment debate are when it relates, as it were to our own backyard. It is relatively easy for us to be in favour of good things and to be against sin. When the debate is kept pretty abstract and we all vote in favour of 'motherhood and apple pie', all is well. But of course there are hard issues involved in caring for our brothers and sisters and part of being a member of synod is about making decisions even when they are uncomfortable and when they involve us in taking action which will not always be easy. Do we really want things to change in our own backyard?

Alastair Macintosh in his book *Hell and High Water* writes,

"So here is the real challenge of climate change. It whisks us up in a whirlwind and throws us down against ... ourselves. That is why the central thesis of this book is that climate change cannot be tackled by technical, economic and political measures alone. These things are all important but in addition and perhaps most important of all we have to look at ourselves. We have to address not only the outer world of atmospheric science, economic imperatives and realms of political possibility but also the inner world of psychology and I will suggest spirituality. The bottom line and top priority is that we must get to grips with the roots of life and what gives it meaning."

A morning spent as we are about to spend this morning talking about the environment, clergy retirement housing and the budget can be a morning simply to nod through some motions put together by some well meaning people, or it can be another step on the road of recognising our responsibilities and working together to grow in our maturity and by our words and our deeds showing to others how seriously we take the call to become the body of Christ, the people of God.