

Sunday after Ascension: John's last Cathedral Eucharist Acts 1.6-14; John 17.1-11

The journey of reconciliation - the journey we are called to together.

This is an extraordinary place - it is the gate of heaven!

It's hard to know how to capture it, to say what needs to be said. This morning feels like the family goodbye - this afternoon will be the goodbye to the wider family. We have been on a journey together over the last thirteen years, and it has been amazing. I've been so privileged to be here, in this role, and we have seen some amazing things as we have travelled the way of our calling with one another and with God. It's been quite a journey.

This Cathedral, as we know, is a journey in itself - to move from the devastation of the ruins and the *Father Forgive* through into the new Cathedral by way of the well endowed devil, across the brass letters proclaiming that the Cathedral 'burned to the glory of God', past the boulder font and the baptistery window and between the rows of endless chairs ... the tablets of the word with their promises of God's grace, the extraordinary eagle lectern and the disconcerting flight of birds, or are they thorns, or coat hangers above the choir stalls, and up into the sanctuary itself. The massive concrete altar, topped with varnished wood, and the abstract cross behind, cradling or springing from the original silvered cross of nails.

This is place that speaks truth into a world where truth seems to have become a slippery thing, a word attached to anything that a leader wants to be true. Yet here we acknowledge the truth of a broken world - the consequences of our actions, nation turning against nation, race against race, class against class. All of us finding unwanted but unavoidable resonances within ourselves in the seven stanzas of the Litany. But if the ruins speak truth of the brokenness of the world, the new cathedral speaks truth of God - and what humanity can be in God's hands.

It all depends what we do with the mess we've made of things. If we take the old Cathedral, like Bishop Huyshe Yeatman-Biggs in the statue in the ruins, in our hands and give it to God in all its burned out devastation, what is given back to us is this, all around us. If we take what we have done with our lives, the mess and the brokenness, and give them to God, what's given back is us – our true selves - still broken but now beautiful. We do this week by week in the Eucharist, in the broken bread and poured out wine of our lives, returned to us as the bread of life, the cup of salvation.

Back to the Cathedral: I have often said that this Cathedral is perfect. I would not want it any other way. But it's also broken. The same is true of our lives - we might want them to be perfect, but we all know how we respond to perfect people - we feel intimidated, envious, distant. It's in our cracks that we find connection, jagged edges healed as they join with someone else's pain, still letting through the golden light of God's healing love. *There is a crack in everything, it's how the light gets in.*

Today is my last Sunday in ministry here as Dean of Coventry. It's not deliberate that it's the Sunday after Ascension - the timing is due to the choir being on holiday for the next two Sundays! But it's poignant, nonetheless. The point of this season is that Jesus has gone, and the disciples are left to get on with the work... the work of the Holy Spirit, powerfully present in Jesus, is now to be poured out on the whole community, to guide and equip each to play their part.

The gospel reading set for this morning is a fitting reading for today in so many ways - not least because it takes us back to the chapters in St John's Gospel that we looked at together in the Compline Services in Holy Week, continuing that story. If you were there, you may recall that we reflected together on Jesus' preparation for his parting in the crucifixion, recognising the anxieties in both Jesus and the disciples at all that was unfolding. Today is the beginning of the prayer that Jesus offers as that final earthly journey begins, and it starts with Jesus' acknowledgement that he has done the work he was sent to do.

I don't know if I can wholly identify with that - but I can at least in part. I'm so grateful for all that we have been able to do together as a Cathedral over these last thirteen years. As I said a few weeks ago at the annual meeting, together we have made this a place of wide open hospitality, we have affirmed and welcomed those who have often felt marginalised, we have stood with those suffering violence and conflict around the world, and we have looked for ways to pay for all of that work, sometimes more successfully than others!

As I've been thinking about what I might say today, on my last Sunday, I've been looking back at what I said on my first weekend here. I'm not sure whether to be encouraged or discouraged to see that I've been saying the same thing for thirteen years - but I'm going to say it again this morning, this time for the last time! It seems that I was caught by the reality of what Coventry Cathedral is all about even before I took up this position of Dean, and in truth it's never once let me go. I don't suppose it will, even as I leave.

On my first Sunday I spoke of: *Journeying and revealing* – travelling together and discovering. I said, *We'll be doing that together over the coming years, and I look forward to that very much. And loving – I hope we'll be doing that, to – sharing the love of God with one another, and sharing the love of God without discrimination with all who come through our doors, and with those who do not: it's no use always expecting people to come to us - "we are the cathedral" – we also need to be moving out, as a community, into the city, into the diocese, into the county, as well of course as into the world, although it seems to me that we already do some of that.*

Journeying was the theme - it was the season of Epiphany, and we thought together about the Magi on their journey. I asked, So *where* do we go from here, and *how* do we get there? *Where* we go is perhaps best described as 'deeper into the Kingdom of God – 'and that can mean many things. It can take many forms, but its heart I believe is relationship, inclusion, participation with God and one another.

So that's the journey we have been on together, my friends, my family. It is the journey of reconciliation, the journey that drew me to send in an application for this role in May 2012, fourteen years ago, just two days before I left for a month in Israel Palestine. A journey based in our core text of 2 Cor 5.18 - God was in Christ reconciling the world to Godself, and has given, entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation. A journey described in the Community of the Cross Nails as healing the wounds of history, learning to live with difference and celebrate diversity, building a culture of justice and peace.

Over the four sermons that I preached in January 2013, I spoke of the priorities which I believed were fundamental to the years that we would spend together. They were three fold: to put those three priorities of the Community of the Cross of Nails firmly at the heart of the life of the Cathedral and the Diocese, to invest in our relationships with God; and to build our relationships with one another. To prioritise prayer and our spiritual life, and to build community. I still think we have a way to go, but of course we have - it's a journey, one that I've come to describe as a *journey from a fractured past towards a shared future*. The journey of reconciliation. As image that I used often when I arrived was, "hand in hand in hand" - hand in hand with one another, hand in hand with God.

I learned two weeks ago in the US that the graduation ceremony at your first, bachelor's, degree at an American University is called commencement, because it's the commencement of the rest of your studies or the rest of your life. So this is not an ending, it's a commencement. If you've travelled with me over these last years, you will know my love of allusions to scenes from the movies. In one version of my First Sunday morning sermon here, I finished with a reference to the final scene of *Sleepless in Seattle*, when Tom Hanks, meeting Meg Ryan for the first time, on the roof of the Empire State Building, holds his hand out to hers and says, "Shall we?"

You all are called to take one another's hands, and place them into the hand of God, as you go forward together - and I look forward to hearing where the journey takes you. As Whitney Houston sang - in a Dolly Parton song, I should affirm - I will always love you. Perhaps the choir could sing?

Now to the one who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. Eph 3. 20,21