Well, it’s good to be here! At last – it’s felt like a long wait to me, and I think perhaps to you, too.

We’re in the season of Epiphany – and a cold coming we certainly had of it. If you know TS Eliot’s poem about the coming of the Magi, you will have in your head an image of a long and difficult journey with troublesome camels – refractory is the word Eliot uses – to an unexpected conclusion, with none of the pomp and comfort one would expect to accompany a new king. But this season of Epiphany is not just about journeying, it is also about revealing: revealing the presence and salvation of God to the world. And as we revisit this season year by year, it’s our annual opportunity to reflect on how God is revealed to us, how he is revealed amongst us, and how he is revealed through us to the world.

Journeying and revealing – travelling together and discovering. 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.

It’s an exciting and somewhat daunting task. (As I was typing this. I found that I had typed ‘exhausting’ rather than ‘exciting’!) But it’s far from impossible. Rather wonderfully, some of the clues as to why that’s true can be found in the readings today. I’d like to draw on those, and say some things about how I see the future: I look forward to hearing from you, of course, and forgive me for speaking first, as it were, in this conversation.

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 is relationship, inclusion, participation with God and one another. (I spoke about this a little yesterday.) These of course are the hallmarks of the gospel, and we see them reflected again in the readings today, especially the first reading. How we get there is also reflected in the readings – especially the second. So let’s explore them together for a moment or two.

In the reading from First Corinthians, Paul begins to explain to the wonderfully diverse, but fractured and fractious community in Corinth that they all serve the same God, and are filled with the same Spirit – regardless of the fact that they look quite different, and all have quite different parts to play.

It’s a tapestry, of course, coloured and woven by the Spirit – I can only assume that you must be weary with ‘tapestry’ illustrations here. Even if it is sagging a little, and needing £700,000 spending on it (sigh). Every thread has its part to play, its colour to reveal, and together an astounding image of Christ is revealed to the world.

Let’s not get too distracted here about the manifestation of the Spirit. I don’t subscribe to the view that this list of ‘spiritual gifts’ is either definitive or exclusive: it is illustrative of the way this church had experienced the Spirit at work. Our story here will have something in common with Corinth, and much that is different. But it is the same Spirit who works in all.

Just as, of course, it is the same Spirit who is at work in the churches of Dresden, of Israel Palestine, of South Africa, of Georgia, of New Zealand, of the United States … of the places which with us share the particular revealing ministry of reconciliation in the world which issues from this place.

It’s in our very diversity, and in our commitment to relationship within that diversity, that the gospel is revealed. This is why I am convinced that the ministry represented by the international community of the cross of nails needs to be right at the heart of the ministry of this cathedral. It’s not an added, an accidental extra, bolted on to the side, for those that are interested in that sort of thing.
The ministry of reconciliation is the ministry of the gospel, a priestly ministry which reveals the presence of God in the world, and invites all into relationship with him. It’s this ministry which opened up the possibility of community to the dysfunctional and excluded people of Corinth. I am thrilled with the newly articulated three fold vision of the community of the cross of nails, of which I am delighted to be Dean:

- Healing the wounds of History
- Learning to live with difference and celebrate diversity
- Building a culture of peace

When I first saw these articulated in the papers surrounding the appointment, my heart skipped a beat. That’s something worth giving your life for, was my first thought.

But just because it’s worthwhile, doesn’t mean it’s automatically possible. So where might or hope come from, that we can build this open community pregnant with the possibilities of Christ? Well, like using up lifelines on Who Wants to be a Millionaire, we haven’t yet used both our readings. If the first sets out the vision – where we go - the second sets out the means – it tells us how we might begin to get there.

I love the gospel reading. It’s a beauty. It describes how Jesus walks into the most human of situations, with all the makings of a memorable disaster, and turns it into a piece of heaven. A very apt story for Coventry, don’t you think? There’s a wedding party. Wedding parties in Jesus’ day involved the whole village, and might have gone on for several days … and then the unthinkable happens. (Having struggled back from Sainsbury’s through the starting snow on Thursday evening with a car full of wine for visiting friends and family, not sure if they would make it to the installation through the weather, this story has a particular poignancy.) The wine gives out … and no-one, it seems, knows quite what to do. It’s not clear what Jesus was doing at this point – perhaps he was sitting in the corner being holy? I rather hope not. Anyway, his mother finds him, and tells him the sad news. Jesus’ response is, of course, perplexing – I’m not sure I’m ready for this, he says. I’m still working on what my first big presentation should be, how to launch my big mission. But Mary presses on regardless and fetches the servants over for his instruction. Mary’s persistence in the face of Jesus’ apparent reluctance to get involved could of course be the basis for a whole theology and practice of prayer, but we’ll leave that for another time, for this is the point in the story where things begin to get really interesting!

First off, we should notice the size of the water jars. They are huge. In total, there is between 600 and 900 litres of wine – that’s at least 1000 bottles. Let’s say 100 cases. A good amount, I’d say, for a week’s celebration in a village. An exuberant, generous amount.

Secondly, we should notice what they are full of: nothing. We don’t move, in this story, from the jars straight to the miracle. Jesus does not miraculously fill the jars with water. He transforms what has been offered, by the servants, in obedience to his command. The servants obediently do what Jesus tells them to do – just as they are instructed by his mother (I am quite a fan of Mary). And what they do seems foolish, inconsequential, of no apparent significance to the situation.

The servants were not responsible for the miracle. They weren’t responsible for the solution to the problem. They were simply asked to be obedient to Christ, to act and to offer what they had – in this case, their strength and the water – to Jesus. The rest was up to him.

There is a lot about being servants here in this cathedral. There are huge texts in the floor. We have a chapel to Christ the servant. We are also called to serve Christ – and wonderful things can happen. Things beyond our wildest imagining.

Thirdly, we see what happens next. The water becomes wine, and the party continues – hospitality happens, and community comes alive again. What was impossible, through the co-operation of the community, and the obedience of the servants, together with the miracle of Christ’s word, becomes real. If any of those things were missing – if Mary had not spoken to Jesus, if the servants had not listened to him, if they had not been obedient, if Christ had not chosen to reveal himself – the miracle would not have happened. It’s a miracle of participation, of inclusion, of offering and the transforming power of the Spirit. Of revealing Christ for who he is – the one who invites us all to a heavenly party.
I have been looking forward to this service since I sat in the cathedral on a rainy afternoon back in May – to stand at
the altar and invite this holy community and the Spirit to gather together for the transformation of lives and the
revealing of truth. As we gather in the Eucharist, we come to offer bread and wine on the altar. I have a personal
prayer as that bread and wine is held up to God before the great prayer of thanksgiving, that in the bread we offer
all that we have made of our lives, the fruitfulness or otherwise ... and in the wine we offer all that has happened to
us – both the celebration and the struggle, the wine mingled with the water like the blood and the tears that have
accompanied our days. As we offer all that personal history, it is taken and transformed, just as the great water jars
were transformed in Cana, by the overwhelming grace of God and offered back to us as the bread and wine of life
itself.

And so this is how we will move forward: hand in hand in hand. Hand in hand with one another, hand in hand with
God. Enjoying our differences, celebrating our diversity, healing the wounds of history and building a culture of
peace.

And so I invite you to share with me in two priorities at this new stage of ministry:

- Find out about one another – build community
- Put your hand into the hand of God: make prayer a priority

And if you want a third, because priorities often come in threes, it seems, to join with me to offer what you have,
however huge or however meagre it may be, for the building of the Kingdom of God here.

But the most important of these three is the middle one: to make prayer our priority. A cathedral is called to be an
engine of prayer against the Almighty, in John Donne’s words. We are called to pray: to pray for the world, to pray
for the diocese, to pray for the city. I will be looking with my colleagues at our practice of prayer and worship in our
cathedral together. And I want to hear from you about our life of prayer and worship. Do you have a dream for it?
Please share it with me, and with us. Prayer destroys strongholds, prayer liberates prisoners, prayer opens the eyes
of the blind, prayer sets us free.

These are uncertain times, some would say, in the life of our church and our nation – times when we know things
are changing, and we are not always sure where to turn. And in such times it is often good to draw on wisdom from
our forebears – sometimes ancient, sometimes more recent. I found myself thinking on the Minnie Louise Haskins
poem, quoted by King George VI in his Christmas broadcast in the early days of the war that destroyed the old
cathedral. As we ponder the call from God to go hand in hand with each other, we also hear his call to go hand in
hand with him:

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: “Give me a light that I may tread safely into the
unknown.” And he replied:“Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you
better than light and safer than a known way.” So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the
night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

Let us pray ...