It’s quite a long day. It’s been quite a long weekend. I have been looking forward to this hour or so, as a point of almost familiar peace in the midst of frenetic activity.

Evensong is one of the great gifts of the English cathedral tradition – a gift which is, sadly, insufficiently known and appreciated. It is a place of belonging, a place of beauty – an opportunity for quiet reflection, sitting in a stream of history.

I don’t know how many of you were at the service yesterday. It was huge! I’m sure I will never forget it. At one point it felt so long. I thought perhaps we should pitch tents and get primuses going to make a cup of tea. It included some momentous promises, and not all of them made by me.

Of course, the promises it contained which were the most significant were those made by God, of which we were reminded: God was in Christ reconciling humankind to himself, and to one another.

And this one, put into the liturgy at my request because it had been said to me in my previous post, and I had found it a source of great strength and comfort. Said at the moment of the bishop handing over the license, it said ...

Receive it confidently, serve Christ joyfully, put your trust in God, he is faithful.

We face an enormous task here. Let’s make no bones about it. We have a wonderful history, an incredible past. And, I truly believe, an even more wonderful future: but it will take everything we have, and much more besides, to see it secured for the next fifty years – for that is what we must be aiming for.

How can we face this future? Well, if it’s not too clichéd, in the same way that Provost Howard faced the future as he stood in the rubble of the bombed cathedral some seventy two years ago ... by putting our trust, and our confidence, in God, and making our lives – and our resources - available to him for his work.

In the readings this evening, we heard about listening to God in the quiet of the temple by night. Not a bad theme for evensong. And not a bad priority: but it’s worth recognising that the message Samuel heard was not, in itself, an encouraging one. What was encouraging was that the Lord was speaking at all: for without him, all of this – around us – is worthless. So what’s it to be: to be ready to hear challenging words, or to rather God did not speak at all? We have to choose the challenge – here, in what feels like a safe place, to be ready to be made un-safe – in order to find the greater safety of being in God’s hands.

Which leads us nicely to the second reading from Ephesians: I therefore, a prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. And what is that calling? With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In other words, to build, and sustain, community.

Then Paul echoes the words from the first letter to the Corinthians that were read at the Eucharist this morning, and which will be read again at Cathedral praise this evening: there is one body, and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all (who is above all and through all and in all). I feel a Queen song coming on – but perhaps that’s the wrong illustration for the demographic of this service, though you can never tell these days! Seven ones. Seven is such an evocative number. The seven sins called to mind in the litany. The completeness of the number seven.

We are one, but we’re not the same – now we’re in U2 (again). My past job was in the area of vocation, and the exploration of diverse gifts within a relational church is very much in my blood. I love the fact that we have these three or four quite different services on a Sunday, that we are a diverse cathedral in a diverse city in a diverse church...
in a diverse world. A kaleidoscope of God’s glory, shifting lights as he moves us by his Spirit. Do each of you know the part you are called to play?

I doubt it, because the part we are called to play keeps changing throughout our lives. I have a hunch about the part I’m called to – but working it out is going to take some time. We are called to grow together, to be built up, strong and expressive of God’s powerful love. And to do that, we need to pray – which takes me back to the first reading, and my call to you as we begin this new chapter of our cathedral’s life together.

At the heart of this cathedral’s life need to be these three things: prayer, study and the sacraments – all bound together in an offering of worship. Everything else we are and do must flow from this beating heart. I rejoice in the diversity of worship here – and I pray that it will pump blood around the life we share together, and beyond it, to the city and to the world.

Many years ago, Provost Bill Williams sought to commend a simple Coventry Rule to the international community of the Cross of Nails. I would like to revisit that hope, which seems to have become a little forgotten. But not just for the CCN – for all of us (and by the way, I am hoping that we will integrate the message and ministry of the CCN much more into cathedral and diocese). What might it mean, to renew our commitment to give time to prayer, to the sacraments, and to study of scripture and sacred writings? ... What might it lead to?

This is the house of God, the gate of heaven – a place in the midst of a journey, like Jacob’s back towards the Land of promise, a place where angels are seen, coming and going, linking heaven to earth. A place from which we emerge limping, but walking in the sunlight of God’s new morning.

I’m delighted to be here, and excited about the journey we will be making together in the coming years – a journey on which we will be joined by many others. Some will share our faith, and some will not. Some will share our traditions, and some will not. But together we will be building the Kingdom of God.