The figure of St. Michael outside the cathedral is one of the most striking pieces of sculpture in any English cathedral – I think so, anyway, but I guess I am little biased. It is both beautiful and powerful, arms flung wide in complete confidence. But it is not an image of brutality, for all its power – this figure is exercising not his own power, but rather the power of the living and awesome God – and it is in God’s strength that he vanquishes the devil at his feet.

This cathedral is a living reminder of that defeat of evil captured in the statue fixed to its East wall (or its western wall, to be geographical rather than liturgical). It stands as a space to welcome all into the narrative of the overcoming of evil by the powerful love of God. That is the genius of this place - that in the ruins there is complete acknowledgement of the devastating destruction that is wrought by humanity. I was reminded of that again this week when it was reported that a huge study of climate change has concluded that the determining factor in the dramatic changes in our environment is caused not by arbitrary forces or changes in nature, but by the impact of human behaviour. We have a phenomenal ability to take our creative energies, our ability to face and overcome challenge, and to use them to defeat others, rather than to work together for the peace and good of all.

In the past year, we have found ourselves rediscovering our fundamental calling to reconciliation in the cathedral. We have been reminded that reconciliation is not something that takes place out there – but in here (in our own hearts, our own minds), and here in our own community. That’s much more challenging! It’s challenging as we gather for our many different activities in the cathedral building, amongst other things – parking spaces are often the real testing place for whether people are really putting the needs of others first!

But that brings me to St. Michael’s Singers, celebrating your fiftieth anniversary tonight. What a wonderful jubilee, as you have gathered to sing of the mighty works of God in this place for fifty years. Like the figure of St. Michael, you stand proud and powerful, but celebrating the strength and power of God rather than in your own strength. Sing out of the love and hope of God! Sing out the triumph of God over evil!

It is my belief that the task of the choir serves the same purpose as this building – to raise visitors’ hearts and minds to God, and his hope made real for all in Jesus Christ, and to draw them into an experience of that for themselves. Like the angels, like the living creatures of the tapestry ... and sometimes just as terrifying! And of course, that message will be most compelling where it is true for you, too. That doesn’t mean denying the difficult realities of our lives, which we all have, nor does it mean leaving them behind when we come here to sing. It means gathering the heights and the depths within and around us, and turning them into an offering of worship. I’m told that the new Archbishop of Canterbury does not favour Howells, with whom we started this evening, because he finds him too doleful. Justin, like so many of us, has known personal tragedy: he does not deny that reality, but also wants to see that reality turned to hope through the grace of God in Christ. That’s our witness here in the building, the charred cross, the cross of nails, the new cathedral which is the home of this choir. So sing out for love, sing out for
hope, sing out for honesty, sing out for peace in a world which is broken but which can yet know the healing balm of the Spirit, the gift of God in Christ.