I’m delighted that this afternoon we will be installing our new Canon Treasurer. He’s not here to listen to what I have to say – but I’ll let him have a copy. We’ve been waiting a long time for this appointment – it’s over two years since our last senior administrative manager moved on, and since then we have needed to rely on a number of people who have stepped into the breach. The role is to look after the sustainability of all that we do here – our resources.

I explained last week that we have identified four values, or priorities, in the life of the cathedral – welcome, worship, reconciliation and resources. The first three are our first priorities – but we need the fourth to do the first.

So I am looking forward very much to welcoming Stephen into this vital position. It was difficult choosing a title, and over the last two years we have hovered around Director of Operations, Business Manager, Resource Director. The title of Canon Treasurer reflects Stephen’s ordination, and picks up on similar titles used elsewhere – I’m very pleased with it, and with him! (Grace Cathedral in San Francisco has a ‘Canon of Operations’ – but I wasn’t sure I could live with that!)

But why should a cathedral need a business manager, a chief executive, a manager of operations? I received an unhappy email this week from a visitor who was wanting to pray at the foot of the tapestry, and unhappy about the entrance charge, or offer of the prayer circle at the back of the Nave. What are you, she asked – and asked again, after I had replied – a cathedral, or a business, or a tourist attraction. As with many of these questions, I had sought to explain that whilst we exist primarily for worship and prayer, we also function in a world in which salaries need to be paid, heating bills need to be met, buildings need to be maintained – and mission needs to be staffed! But somehow we all seem to find that a hard message to hear. The cathedral is in the world – and God is at work in the world, not just in heaven (as we pray several times daily in the Lord’s Prayer) – and we need to work with him in the realities of the world.

The fact that we are in the world roots our mission in reality – and, as it happens, gives me a point of connection with other SME’s, other small businesses in the region. I would love to open our doors without question to all comers, would love to say ‘yes’ to all enquiries, would love to add sufficiently to our financial and human resources to take the pressure off those who work and volunteer here. The truth is, however, that we are a business – albeit a charitable one – and that does not make it less Godly, but recognizes that like all of us living our lives day by day, the cathedral exists in the real world, with all of its challenges, conflicts, and opportunities. And so the way that we share in and manage the life of the cathedral, and the cathedral family, reflects the way we manage our own lives, trusting in God but also playing our own part.

Yesterday I took part in the abseil from the roof of the cathedral, joining with 49 others to raise money for Christian Aid. Abseiling demands complete trust – and total commitment. There is a moment where you let yourself over the parapet, and then have to lean out form the wall, which is quite unlike anything else – except perhaps the adventure of living the Christian faith. There are no half measures, or you spin uncontrollably, and foolishly, and need to be rescued.

Our epistle today, St. Paul’s letter to the Philippians is a real letter to a real church trying to work out how to live with each other and be obedient to God in the real world. Last week we looked at the way Paul exhorted the people to keep pressing forward, trusting in God, but committing themselves wholeheartedly to the task. This week, that theme continues into the closing sections of the letter.
Paul starts, in this final chapter, by calling the church to ‘stand firm in the Lord’ – to make him their first priority. But the next thing he says is to urge two women in the church to get on with each other: this is the gritty reality of church life, that we need to work at our relationships – that just like our finances, they take work. Reconciliation and Resources, our third and fourth priorities here in the cathedral are not just given to us – we need to work at them, every day.

And they are a shared task – in v.3, Paul addresses a nameless third person to help the two women to be reconciled. Like us here, the early church which was charged with the task of carrying the ministry of reconciliation out into the world had first to learn to be reconciled itself.

Paul then moves on to worship (as we work our way backwards through our priorities). The word ‘rejoice’ can also be translated ‘farewell’ – and so the importance of these next verses as the last things Paul wants to leave his readers with is underlined. Let your frame of mind be characterized by thanksgiving, and by a generosity of Spirit. I heard last week that Provost Howard made it a spiritual discipline to find something to be thankful for every single day – perhaps that should be remembered alongside his commitment to hope and peace, as his message for the world.

And of course after the final section extolling the value of allowing our minds to dwell on the virtues, because these will translate into the way we live our lives, Paul returns yet again to the message of ‘Press On’ – Keep on doing the thing that you have learned, and received, and heard and seen in me,” he says, “and the God of peace will be with you.”

We continue to be challenged in our life together and in our shared ministry – but God calls us to keep pressing on. It’s easy to feel intimidated or defeated by the task – but I believe that God will honour our commitment. Yesterday I did a small thing for Christian Aid – and the hardest bit of it was lowering myself over the edge of the roof. But by that stage, when I was up on the top and someone said ‘Who’s first’, it wasn’t really the moment to back out – and the same was true for Deryck, and Emma, and Jane, and David, and all the fifty others who went over the edge too. Sometimes you have to press on with the commitment you made to see it through.

Our commitment here now is to be a Centre for Reconciliation, and to do this through our shared commitment to Welcome, Worship, Reconciliation and Resource. As I said last week, we now have Canons representing all those areas – but they are not there to do it all by themselves. I want to challenge each of you to play a part in each of those things, starting with Welcome. Welcoming can be tricky – we are not all naturally garrulous. One of the easiest practical ways of welcoming people is to give them a cup of coffee – and the next is to chat to them whilst they are drinking that coffee. We have a fabulous opportunity here to offer coffee to visitors right at the end of the service, in one of the best locations in Coventry – but we are a bit short staffed. The Canon Pastor has offered to staff the coffee trolley, but she can’t be doing it every week, and so she needs some help. It’s not difficult – but if we are going to change the world, starting with Coventry, we are going to need some commitment.

(And huge thanks to the Catering Team, and the Choir Parents, who play such a big part in offering welcome.)

The gospel reading describes a fabulous banquet to which all were invited. Some didn’t want to come at all. Others came, but didn’t want to really be part of it, didn’t want to put the right clothes on … they were there, but they wouldn’t commit, and then they weren’t able to stay. ... If we are going to be part of what God is doing in Coventry, and in the world – it’s like a banquet, but one in which we are all called to wholeheartedly give of ourselves, as well as to receive what is given. To be part of what’s happening here is to be committed to welcome, worship, reconciliation – and to playing a part in providing the resources which make that possible.

Worship – how about coming along to daily prayer. We would like to double the attendance in our services – will you be part of that - rooting all that we do in our practice of worship, in lives offered day by day to God.

Reconciliation – both in the character of our life together, and in welcoming in those from far afield. Allowing the healing of the wounds of history – not hanging on to resentments, either in our shared life, in our personal lives, in
our public life. Enjoying and celebrating difference and diversity, the fact that we are not all the same and do not all have the same tastes and preferences. And building a culture of peace – which in the end, is a culture of welcome, of making space for one another.

... And that brings us back to Resource. We don’t want our need for Resources to dominate. We want to be led by our welcome, known for our generosity of heart – the cathedral that looks for a way to say yes to the visitor, the outsider – that looks for a way to say yes to one another, but recognizes the cost of doing that.

I did an interview at 9.15 this morning with the Coventry Telegraph about the abseil, and also about the Harvest service for the Coventry Foodbank. ‘How did that compare with a typical day in the cathedral,’ asked Sam, the interviewer. Well – to be honest, the way the cathedral connects people is extraordinary, and no two days are the same. We really can change the world – starting here on our doorstep – starting here inside our doors. We are all invited to be part of that, we are all invited to give all that we can, working together with the God who gives us everything, in Jesus Christ.

As I said last week, at the moment, we don’t have the resources we need to do the work we believe God is calling us to do. I’m looking again over the next week or two at what I can offer to God for the work he is doing here – and I would like to ask you to do the same. Together, we have everything God needs for his work here, he calls us to be as generous towards him and others, as he has been towards us.

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