This is a sermon about growth and about growing - and about the esources that we have at our disposal in order to grow. As many of you know, we’ve only been in our house for about six months and we are enjoying the changing seasons and what is coming out in our garden. Recently the apple tree at the end of our garden has been full of wonderful blossom, and walking around I am sure we have all noted the amazing and abundant cherry blossom all around us which seems better than ever.

What a momentous few days we’ve just witnessed - a historic general election result changing the political landscape of the UK in ways more radical than most of us can remember; and celebrations for VE Day, that turning point in our history that marked the end of the war in Europe and the starting point of major political and social change. The issue then in 1945 and now in 2015 is quite simply - what happens next? Where will we focus, what are our priorities, and what resources have we at our disposal? For the new government these are big questions calling for magnanimity and generosity, for vision and for focus.

Reflecting on these two momentous events prompts me to speak about the challenge and the opportunity we face in this Cathedral and to ask – for us, what happens next? What will we focus on? What resources have we at our disposal? We know that we are committed to grow; it all boils down to the question: how will we grow? We certainly know the benefits of growing. Growing will eliminate the persistent deficits stretching back years and still facing us. Doing this will lighten our spirits and change our mindsets and attitudes, and increase our hope. Growing means attracting Christian pilgrims in ever greater numbers, it means more tourists and visitors, more people coming to events here and experiencing our buildings and our wonderful spaces, it means more people seeking the resolution of their conflicts, which is to say, more space for hope. Growth or growing is the key to what happens next in our Cathedral.

The resources we have

So let me turn to the Christian resources that we have – the abundant resources at our disposal - and let me go straighthway to our two readings set for this specific Sunday of Easter. The first point that I take away from the reading from the Acts of the Apostles is that God’s Holy Spirit - his essential nature, what he actually is - is available to all. It’s not rationed out to a select few. That’s what we can draw from the little episode that we read about this morning when we heard that ‘the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word’. It fell upon all without exception, without distinction, and without reservation. The impact is big. Astounded Jews, the first Christians, recognise that even outsiders, the pagan Gentiles, can benefit from the divine nature and energy. It shows that God wants to share his divine nature - literally his ecstasy, what goes out of his being - with everyone. And the famous statement of Peter that God has no special favourites because all are favourites rings true powerfully and effectively. The embrace of God is universal and we can hear echoes of the promise of Jesus that ‘when I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to myself’. That is the first resource offered to us. The grace of God is everywhere and for everyone. That should give us hope and encouragement, should it not?

The Gospel passage gives us more help still. Jesus expressly rejects the idea that his disciples have chosen him. ‘You didn’t choose me’. It wasn’t your choice, he says. ‘I chose you’. These are amazingly important words. The initiative is his, it comes from him. Jesus confers huge value and importance on his disciples, they matter to him vitally, and they should feel especially close to him as people who have been appointed to his team.

You and I have been chosen too, and we should feel the importance of belonging to Jesus. To be chosen to do something by somebody else confers value, and the more valuable the task, the more we are likely to feel good in doing it, if we stick with the task and are acknowledged for doing so. Incidentally, I hope that all those who are collecting for Christian Aid this week will feel huge value in this tremendously important task.
So God's Holy Spirit is available to all and God has chosen us to be co-operators in his great work of mission. The message of Jesus is good news. I want you, he says, to have an abundant life, a life full of joy, with that joy being a source of strength. He wants us to bear fruit. Remember this chapter of John’s gospel is all about the image of the vine. 'I am the vine, you are the branches’. We are inseparably linked to him. And Jesus goes on to say that ‘my Father is the one who feeds the vine’. He wants us to be fruitful, just as a fruitful vine bears lots of delicious grapes.

Are not these tremendous resources? (By the way, I haven’t said anything about the resources of imagination or gratitude or Sabbath rest which we could easily add to that tally but which would take another sermon or two!) Our priorities for growth What then are the priorities for growth for us here in this Cathedral?

1. We are committed to growing our congregations, to a growth in our life together. We long to see great queues of people lining up for our services, coming to experience a sense of God and his presence, a sense of his power to revive and refresh, to sing his praise and exalt him forever, to appreciate how much Jesus changes lives. So our first commitment is to the flourishing of our worship.

2. Then we are committed to increasing the number of our visitors. Imagine if people had to queue to see the recently refurbished Sutherland tapestry.

3. We are committed to generating significant new fund raising this year and every year. For example, on Wednesday, the Dean and I are hosting a dinner in London in the Inner Temple to raise funds for our mediation course and for the building up of our conflict resolution capability.

4. We are committed to attracting people and groups and organisations in ever greater numbers to use our space for events.

5. Above all we are committed to the greater use of our buildings as a place of reconciliation - which is why for example we will be teaching a new course on mediation and conflict resolution from 10th – 12th June here in St Michael’s House. We are passionate about wanting to grow the ways in which reconciliation is practised here. Over the coming days and weeks you will be hearing of the specific and practical ways in which we plan to grow with these priorities in mind - and having a burning desire to do so. Growing our tourism, our events, our congregation, our reconciliation and our fundraising.

In addition to God’s abundant resources, we have in this Cathedral community an extraordinary array of experience, commitment, energy, talent and enthusiasm - and together we are a powerful team. And beyond this into the wider world there is a huge network of supporters just waiting to be enlisted, not to mention the hidden army of visitors who have visited over the last 50 years, with all the amazing ways of reaching them through social media like Twitter and Facebook.

Jesus said: ‘I chose you’. I chose you to be joyful and fruitful. He is always choosing us. He says: Come to me! Put your hands into mine. Link yourself to me. I will be your resource. And he is always extending out an arm to others. Not just then to us but to everybody. And so you may be asking: What part will I play in this practical task of fruitful development, this growth in our Cathedral? You may be asking, how can I help us grow? That’s the focus and the priority, knowing that the grace of God is fully and freely available. The abundance of God, what has been called the juice of the Holy Spirit that animates, is freely available to all who put their trust in the hands of the living God.