Introduction

Thanks for the invitation to speak this morning.

I was a Vicar in Rugby for over 20 years, but for the last 3 years I have worked with Archdeacon Morris Rodham and my role across the diocese is in helping churches become healthy and to grow as they develop the 8 essential QCs of growing churches, as they become all that God wants them to be, as we prepare for the return of Jesus!

Advent

Today is the first Sunday of Advent – a time when we look back to the first coming of Jesus as a baby; and we look forward to his coming again as the King of Kings.

The supreme message of Advent is to get ready for Jesus’ return, his second coming.

Paul prays in 1 Thess 3:13 “may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless ... at the coming of our Lord Jesus will all his saints”.

Jesus is coming back and when he does, he comes with all the saints of history, the multitude of Christian believers of every age; and Paul prays for us to be found blameless on that day – whenever it comes!

Jesus warned in his teachings of that day when he will come again, but before he does so he tells us of the terrible things that will happen in the heavens and on the earth. He speaks of these terrible events as signs of his return and for us to be ready.

We heard a summary of this in Luke this morning but he goes into much more detail in Mark 13 and Matthew 24. He speaks of:

- Wars and rumours of wars
- Nations rising up against nations
- Natural disasters like earthquakes and famines
- Persecution of Christians
- Divisions within families

These are all shocking things – but they are inevitable before Jesus returns to this planet.

Recently we have all been horrified by

- The bombing of the Russian passenger jet
- The barbaric attacks in Paris
- The brutal war and murder in Syria
- The atrocities in Beirut and Mali

We are horrified – yes
We are appalled – yes
We are shocked and disgusted – yes
But surprised? No – we shouldn’t be!

Jesus warns us that these things will happen and will precede his return as King to overcome all evil within the world.
The urgent message of Advent is for us to be prepared for when he returns. — we do not know when it will be; - we do not know how it will happen.

But we are called as Christians to live as though it may happen today — there is a sense of urgency.

**The 8 Essential Qualities**

But how do we prepare ourselves?

We prepare by becoming all that God wants us to be:

- As a church
- As individuals

And this is what the 8 essential QCs of healthy growing churches are all about — becoming what God wants us to be.

The most extensive church research ever undertaken has shown that in all healthy, growing churches, whatever their size, location, or churchmanship, have the same 8 quality characteristics.

1. **Empowering Leadership**

   Leaders in healthy growing churches intentionally seek to share their leadership, to enable others to lead and to develop their gifts and roles within the life of the church and rejoice when they do better than they do! They delegate responsibility and provide the necessary support to others.

2. **Gift-based Ministry**

   In healthy growing churches every individual plays a part using their gifts and skill — people do things because they are gifted at it, not because there’s no one else to do it! As they serve in this way people are fulfilled and flourish in their mission and ministry both within and outside the church community.

3. **Passionate Spirituality**

   In healthy growing churches members care deeply about God and their relationship with Him, nurtured through prayer, worship and spiritual disciplines, including sacrificial giving. They manifest the fruit of the Spirit in every aspect of their lives as they pursue holiness and obedience to God.

4. **Effective Structures**

   In healthy growing churches the structures exist to enable the church to function effectively — they don’t do things because they have always done it that way! Structures are flexible, able to adapt and change as necessary to facilitate further growth and to meet the current needs serving the mission and purpose of the church.

5. **Inspiring Worship**

   The research shows that all healthy growing churches have Inspiring Worship. This is about quality rather not style. It will be a high point of the week, and is so inspiring people will want to bring along people who do not have a Christian faith to experience it. Visitors enjoy the experience. Inspiring worship means people are enabled to encounter God Himself.

6. **Holistic Small Groups**

   Healthy growing churches were also found to have Holistic Small groups. A Small Group is any church group which is small, defined by its size rather than its function. So it can include bible study groups but also the needlework group, the church council, the MU, the fabric committee, any group that is small!

   In Holistic Small Groups the 8QCs are in evidence: loving relationships; passionate spirituality; effective structures; empowering leadership, the use of spiritual gifts and meaningful prayer, whatever the function of the group.

7. **Need-oriented Evangelism**

   Healthy growing churches were found to have Need-oriented Evangelism — this is when the love of Jesus is demonstrated to the wider community in both **deed** and **word**. Where the local community is served by the Christian community as a demonstration of God’s love, where they hear the story of the love of Jesus told by the
Christian community as they speak naturally about their faith, and where they are given opportunities to respond to that love by following Jesus themselves.

If any of these three elements is missing it is not NOE!

8. Loving Relationships

Finally, healthy growing churches were found to be characterised by a fun, welcoming and forgiving atmosphere; reflected in relationships that are loving, affirming, supporting and encouraging. Having a lot of laughter in them, being accessible and accepting of the wider community.

These 8 Quality Characteristics are found in all growing churches across the world. I want to be part of a church like that, where:

- The leaders empower others;
- People serve according to their passion and gifts
- Members have a deep personal faith in God, in Jesus Christ
- The structures are effective in serving the church’s purpose
- The worship is inspiring
- The Small Groups are holistic
- The evangelism meets the community at its point of need, and people come to know Jesus.
- Relationships are characterised by love.

Conclusion

But this can only happen when we each one of us, you and me, become all that God wants us to be personally in our lives, when these qualities are found in each one of us as individuals:

- when I empower other people
- when I use my gifts for others
- when I am passionate about Jesus
- when my life is structured to effectively serve God
- when I am an inspired worshipper
- when I am sharing my life with others
- when I serve the wider community and share my faith
- when my relationships are loving

I long to be part of a church like that and I long for the day when the church, the bride of Christ, is ready for the coming of the bridegroom, when we are built up, in unity, mature and become like Christ himself – as Paul puts it in Ephesians.
As you explore these 8 QCs in the life of this great cathedral in the coming months, this is what this is all about – the church, and we as part of the church, becoming all that God wants us to be – then we shall see it grow “all by itself” as God does his work in us. Then we will be ready for Jesus to return.