

INAUGURAL SERMON by BISHOP DORRIEN DAVIES delivered at his ENTHRONEMENT in ST DAVIDS CATHEDRAL (February 3rd 2024)

Little did I ever imagine when I first visited this Cathedral when I was eight years old, what an integral part it and this Diocese would play in my life, and now almost thirty years after...well, a little bit longer... I come as your new bishop to take procession of the Diocese and work with you in proclaiming the Kingdom and sharing in the wonderful good news of the Gospel of Christ. Today means so much, a reflection and evaluation of the past, and an anticipation of what the future may bring, and our part in sharing with others our experience of Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour.

I mi, ac i ni i gyd fel Cristnogion, rydyn ni wedi dod i bwynt pan fydd yn rhaid inni fyfyrion ar y gorffennol, a'n rhan ni wrth gyhoeddi Crist yn y presennol, a sut mae'n rhaid i ni gyfrannu ohonom ein hunain, i sicrhau bod eraill yn dod i adnabod Iesu fel eu Harglwydd a'u Gwardwr personol yn y dyfodol.

In *Isaiah 35* the words we have heard speak of a mourning nation, who had lost their temple, land and identity, Their suffering is manifested in “weak hands”, “feeble knees”, a “fearful heart”, “obscured vision”, “hindered hearing”, “broken bodies”, and “silent tongues”. This body, described by Isaiah, has been totally overwhelmed by despair and weariness, the ability to go forward has been diminished and the general feeling is of loss and sorrow.

Perhaps there are some among us who feel this way about the church, that there are comparisons in how we feel, how we are, that the church is a failing institution and its lack of influence on an increasingly secular society is cause for concern, that its structural changes are undermining its authority and mission, and its divisions, giving the impression of disunity and a lack of focus in respect to what is really important. We feel abandoned, dried up and of no relevance.

But, the good news for us today is that God does not, and shall not, abandon his people.

Sorrow and uncertainty will come to an end and negativity transformed into hope, and hope realised, faith become sight, commitment strengthened, and newness of life found in the changing love and life of God. Verse 10 says “the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion singing: everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away”.

Desolate dry places will be transformed into a paradise, those who live in arid lands know exactly what transformative powers water has on a desert, suddenly! Even a small amount of rain can change a dry desert into a vibrant landscape:

“The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert rejoice and blossom.... they shall see the glory of the Lord”. (V.12)

Here Isaiah confronts fear with promise. “Here is your God... He will come and save you “Ymgryfhewch, nac ofnwch.... This transformation opens up their world, our world, yours and my world in a miraculous way, Verse 5 says, and the way ahead is made clear by God “ A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way!”

“Wele bydd priffordd a ffordd, a gelwir hi yn ffordd Sanctaidd”- Mae ffordd sydd wedi ei pharatoi gan Dduw yn ffordd sicr, mae'n ddiogel. Yn y testun, nid oes unrhyw gyfeiriad at y lleoliad, dim ond bod lleoliadau digroeso yn cael eu trawsnewid, y daith o'n blaenau yn dod yn ffordd ddiogel, y daith hon yn dod yn ffordd i ni allan o gaethiwed ac amheuaeth, trwy ac yng Nghrist daw'r stori hon yn stori i ni, mae'n dod â ni i ddealltwriaeth ddyfnach o gariad trawsnewidiol Duw - ei ddibenion, ei ewyllys, a'i ffordd.

Phillipians 4: St Paul says “Therefore my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord”.

The renowned Pauline theologian Margaret Thrall stated that the word “therefore” links together what Paul wrote in this passage with what he wrote before. Because of the promise of the Resurrection, (*Phil 3.21*) “who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body”.

The Phillipians had all the more reason in this transforming reassurance to “Stand firm in the Lord”. The power of the Risen Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit would change their lives and their mission, they would reflect the Risen Christ in their lives and bring to fulfillment his purposes in and through the ever-changing love and Grace of Jesus: however, this kind of relationship and response to the love of Christ is demanding, Paul knew this and taught this, it requires commitment and sacrifice - in this passage Paul uses the ancient Greek word for crown that described the crown given to an athlete who had won a race (*stephanos*), not a royal crown (*Diadema*), it is a crown of achievement, the Phillipian community were for Paul his trophy, his achievement.

As a believing body of Christians in this diocese the crown we aim to attain will only be won through achievement, hard work, the giving of ourselves and committing ourselves to be firm in JOY, KEEPING THE FAITH AND DOING THE LITTLE THINGS.

Let’s not fool ourselves today, we all know that there are difficulties facing the church, as I said earlier - declining numbers in our congregations, factions, the struggles of meeting our financial responsibilities, coming to terms with structural changes

administratively, too many buildings in which we are reluctant to face the reality that they have long past their suitability as places of worship, and the burden of paying for their maintenance and upkeep; the reality that perhaps we are not prioritising correctly, and asking the questions we need to ask of the Church today. Bishop, clergy and laity have equal responsibility in facing these problems, make difficult decisions and prepare to make plans for the future.

Ymgasglodd pob un ohonom yma heddiw gan sylweddoli bod llawer o anawsterau yn ein hwynebu fel Esgobaeth, a'r ffaith ei bod mor amlwg, nid oes angen esboniad. Rwy'n ymwybodol iawn o'r problemau sy'n wynebu'r esgobaeth hon wrth imi gychwyn ar fy ngweinidogaeth fel Esgob ac rwy'n ymwybodol bod problemau o'r fath yn codi o un genhedlaeth i'r llall, roedd gan hyd yn oed yr eglwys fore ei phroblemau, roedd ganddynt raniadau a gwahaniaeth barn, ond, dyfaldasant, deallent y dybenion eangach, ac ymddiriedasant yn Ysbryd y Duw Byw.

At the beginning of today's service, as I entered the Cathedral, I was welcomed as one who is called to serve. I realise that there is an expectation by the Diocese of me and how I will exercise my ministry as Bishop: "what is he going to do?" and "how is he going to do it?", "in which direction are we going to be led", "will we be able to cope with innovation, change and challenge"- "is he a soft touch or is there a man of steel beneath that cuddly, adorable exterior?" - pertinent questions, and questions which will be answered in time.

However, the question which is central to my mind today far exceeds these and all other questions, and what I ask us today is this "Are we prepared to Love as Christ loves? Are we prepared to serve as Christ serves? Are we prepared to sacrifice, as he sacrificed all for us for the sake of love for us. If we are to see a growing church in this diocese,

a relevant witness, an inclusive and all embracing Christ-like community, a blooming desert, then everything that we will do together as Bishop, clergy and congregations must be and will be steeped deep in the love of Jesus, the example of service, the ultimate prize, the real way, and the refreshing water of life that brings new growth, blossom and fruit, can only be attained through his love, Christ's love for me, my love for you, and our love for one another.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” and when we love in this way we will truly understand the direction which God is leading us, and who it is that is entrusting us with how the church will be known, perceived and experienced in the future - “you did not choose me but I who chose you. And I appoint you to go and bear fruit”. So today isn't about me, it's about us, and trusting in the promises of Jesus and the power of his Holy Spirit which will “bear fruit, and fruit that will last”.

My dear friends, reflecting on the readings of scripture, the praise, worship and prayers we have offered, the fellowship we have shared, the Enthronement of myself as the 130th Bishop of St Davids, I consecrate myself to God today, I pledge myself to you, I promise to serve you in love, and commit this diocese in the name of Christ to bring hope to the despairing, safety to the frightened, reassurance to the outcast, healing to the broken, a sense of belonging to those who feel dejected and undervalued, support to the strong, and the Gospel of Life to the dying.

Fy mhlant annwyl, wrth inni ddechrau'r weinidogaeth newydd hon gyda'n gilydd, gadewch inni fod yn agored i Ysbryd y Duw Byw fel y gallwn gyd-ddweud yn hyderus â llawenydd yn ein calonnau

Tydi a wnaeth y wyrth, O Grist, Fab Duw, tydi a roddaist imi flas ar fyw: fe gydiaist ynof drwy dy Ysbryd Glân, ni allaf tra bwyf byw ond canu'r gân; 'rwyf heddiw'n gweld yr harddwch sy'n parhau, 'rwy'n teimlo'r ddwyfol ias sy'n bywiocáu; mae'r Haleliwia yn fy enaid i, a rhoddaf, Iesu, fy mawrhad i ti.

Amen