



nce this evening, in which he reflected on the historical legacy and the
all.

Let us pray:

Open our eyes, O Lord, as you speak to us in your word in revelation that we may see like John the Divine, the Seer, your heavenly City and seeing may be filled with hope for your work on this Earth. Amen.

God, as I said a week ago, has created a new nation - we have been looking at that all week.

And the people in Antioch, as I said a week ago, saw it for the first time.

Here in this room we are not defined as we were for many years after 1867, we are not defined by colour or nationality or language or class or education or background or contacts.

We are only defined by Christ.

And therefore we are called Christians because there is no other way in this world of defining us.

We are not, as Christians around the world, defined by battle or conquerors of territory, we are marked out differently.

Before they were called Christians, the followers of Christ had been a Jewish movement but they now included Gentiles - a new identification therefore emerged.

They came from all over the known world and not a lot has changed.

We are indigenous and immigrant. We are rich and poor. For some, to own the name of Christ is routine.

For others, it is life and death. All of us, in our conversations have found that growing in our recognition during this last week in our Bible study groups.

Those who are baptised change identity, nationality, their first nationality and their final loyalty. They dance, we dance, to a different tune from the society in which they live. We accept the promise of Christ that in the world there is persecution (John 16: 33)

And the answer to that is that we must hate our lives for Christ's sake (John 12:25). Christians individually and collectively are therefore called to be different to the world around.

Let us go back to 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, you were stateless, you were ~~real~~ aliens

and exiles. but now you are God's people; you have a state and a passport. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Christians are the largest nation on earth. In the first 315 years, Peter's so called holy nation conquered the world's greatest empire without the sword. Today there are two billion of us.

All over the world we run schools, clinics, hospitals. We serve refugees, we wash the feet of those on the street, we feed the hungry, we care for the orphan and the alien.

We challenge Governments over justice, we set up charities for those caught in war.

Who created the Red Cross? A Christian. Who created the great hospitals in London? The monasteries. We are harried and persecuted, we are hunted as Christians from one killing ground to another, but we do not hate as our enemies want us to.

And may I say it by God's grace, by God's grace, this week we have disagreed without hatred. Not as many in the press want us to.

We worship in ancient cathedrals, in modern buildings, in huts, under trees, in the open, in secret when the danger is too great. Some of the greatest art and music in each style of culture springs from Christian scripture and theology.

Worldwide notions of justice are taken from the mouth of Jesus, or from the biblical texts we share with Jewish people: the likes of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Isaiah, from the Torah and the minor prophets.

The Psalms, still after 2,500, 3,000 years, still speak to us of every emotion, from ecstatic to worship, to anger and despair. They are still the living prayer book of the Bible, as Bonhoeffer described them. And when nations get the bible in their own language, they change for the good and they find their identity.

The church is the creation of God and the hope of humanity. The church proclaims that there is hope in death, hope in war, hope in mourning, hope in birth, even birth in a refugee camp. The church proclaims that even if the world hates us, God offers his love, unconditionally, that at this very moment Christ intercedes for us at the right hand of God.

He says: 'Father, bless Michael Curry, Father Bless Justin Badi, Father Bless Jackson, bless this one, bless that one.' The list of these things that we celebrate and proclaim could go on forever, because in each story as we heard from Jackson this morning there is the story of God's work of transformation. For these stories will go on forever because they come from the Eternal God.

BUT, BUT, BUT... there is a problem. It is a problem which is found in the gospels and is plain in the epistles. It is the problem set out in the Old

Testament and New. It is the problem of human beings being sinners. For Christ came to save a world that was at enmity with him that did not recognise him.

He came to save his enemies. You and me.

None of us can reach to God. But Christ has made God known to us. (John 1). We are enemies, not because God started off hating us – far from it. But because we want to have our own way, to be independent of God, to be free of the constraints of perfect love and unlimited grace. What fools we are!

The reality is that God's church is - by God's choice - full of human beings and human beings have a lot of sin, so God's church is full of sinners.

The history of the church reveals a body not only full of saints expressing the love of God but of sinners hungry for power.

God's church preached violent crusades, organised the inquisition, burned people at the stake. God's church covered up the sins of imperialism, took vast sums of money from slave traders. God's church rejected renewal where it did not fit established patterns.

When Wesley came in England in the 18th century and literally tens of thousands of people in the poorest areas of the country came to faith in Christ a bishop at the time - I think it as Bishop Butler, an ancestor of minesaid to him 'your enthusiasm is a very wicked thing Mr Wesley, a very wicked thing indeed'.

God's church sought to eliminate the First Nations and indigenous peoples from colonised territories, those peoples whose cross I'm wearing today, as is Caroline.

God's church fanned the flames of antisemitism and provided a seedbed and a theology for the persecution of the Jews and ultimately for the Holocaust.

God's church protected earthly power while surrendering heavenly hope.

God's church split and divided and treated those with whom there was disagreement as enemies, to be tortured, killed or today to be vilified on social media and insulted in many ways.

In May we found in the Lambeth [Palace] Library, where it ought not to have been, a letter from the 18th Century, about 1723 I think, there it is [letter appears on screen] a letter from a slave in Virginia, to the "Archbishop of London" ... pleading for people to be sent to teach the children of slaves the gospel. As far as we know it was never answered.

But this is not just about the past, however recent ... also our sins are about the present.

During my nine and a half years as Archbishop of Canterbury, and before this time, I have heard many stories of abuse that was covered up. I have heard stories of the literal torture of children, young people and vulnerable adults.

No part of our church has been exempt – such abuse has taken place in evangelical, in high-church and in liberal churches. Abusers have been single or married - of every sort of churchmanship, old and young, ordained or lay, and abuse has been about power.

Worse than that, as you know until the recent past, abuse very often covered up by the authorities in the church and there may be some churches where that is still a temptation.

And I say these words about abuse while knowing there will be some among you here who have been victims of many kinds of abuse: in the church, in your own homes, or elsewhere. Even in these last two days talk to the chaplains, begin to look at how there can be healing.

Wherever abuse takes place it is the gravest misuse of power. It is the darkest of dark sins. It is an affront to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And in the church in this country I want to pay tribute to the bravery and resilience of survivors who told us their stories year after year, again and again until someone listened to them – sometimes for 30 years. And I will continue to apologise with tears in my eyes for the church that let them down so terribly.

Our repentance, here in England or each church where any of these sins are found must involve doing everything we can to make the church a safe place for all people, where everyone can flourish - for power is at the heart of so much that goes wrong.

When the shepherds beat the sheep they disobey what Peter says, we saw that this morning: “Tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.”

The temptations of power are as old as Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel. Power lies behind the greatest paradox, the greatest puzzle of the church: how can it be that institutions based on the gospel, bound up inextricably in the life and death of Jesus, reading the gospels, can themselves do or tolerate or cover up such evil things as the Church has so often done? How can this happen?

Leviticus deals with these issues, the book of Leviticus, they are not new – A quote: “Specifically, it focuses on how ordinary Israel (or humanity), being prone to inadvertent error and deliberate sin, might nonetheless host the radical holiness of God” - that comes from a book published in 2019 by Ellen Davis, on page 63, called ‘Opening Israel's Scriptures’ it’s wonderful.

Another example is by Isabelle Hamley, who led one of the reflections in the bishops’ retreat [in] her commentary on Judges, looking at the point where people had gone most terribly wrong...

As we see in 1 Peter, when as Bishops we do not recognise our power we too easily misuse it: “Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’ (Leviticus, again, he’s quoting)

And he goes on: “If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of our exile.” (1 Peter 1:15-17).

So what must the Anglican Communion do as it faces this paradox, this puzzle: the love of God, the sin so often that we commit, how does it change? How do we move forward? We will always be full of sinners.

It must first be above all a body of those who are reconciled to God and become reconcilers of others. “Just as I have loved you, so you must love one another.” (John 13:34).

How has He loved and how will He love? By washing the feet even of his betrayer, Judas, and of his denier, Peter.

Reconciliation in human affairs, as I’ve said earlier this week, is not agreement, it is disagreement in the context of overwhelming and self-giving love: it is disagreeing well. This is the standard for the shepherds, “for love covers a multitude of sins”, (1 Peter 4:8).

If it wasn’t in the Bible we wouldn’t like that sentence we’d say it’s woolly and fishy... but it’s in the Bible I’m afraid.

Look at Mozambique again - I keep talking about Mozambique - one of the two countries in one of our youngest Provinces, working effectively across Provincial boundaries with Tanzania, with the help of a UN group who are constantly surprised by the skill and knowledge that the church has. I’m not surprised but the UN is because they think we do religion – we don’t do religion we do Christ.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

The Communion must become a body of disciples who are serious and purposeful about following Christ, we’ve been looking at that this day.

That means prayer, alone and together, aloud and silently, in dialogue with scripture. It means communities of prayer like the Benedictines, the Franciscans, the Melanesian Brothers or the more recent Community of St Anselm or the about-to-be launched community at the cathedral of St John the Divine in New York and many others where the heart of life is to desire for God, a hunger to be a close to God.

We transform our churches when at their heart they have deliberate communities of prayer.

The Communion must be a body of witnesses, which knows and can - in simple terms - testify to the good news of Jesus.

Very often at the end of a sermon in the Diocese of Canterbury, in a small rural church – or an urban one, but we’re mostly rural, with 20 or 25 people there – it’s normally 10 but sometimes if they don’t tell people I’m coming it goes up - I challenge people to explain in one minute to the

person sitting next to them their answer to the question that they might be asked on Monday, when someone says ‘Did you have a good weekend ...what did you do?’ and they say ‘ well I did this on Saturday and on Sunday morning we went to church and the person says ... ‘You went to church why on earth would you do that?’ and the challenge [is], I say to them, in one minute with no religious jargon, is to answer that question clearly and simply....

“Always be ready to give an explanation for the hope that is within you, yet with gentleness and grace.” (1 Peter 3:15).

I can tell you when I say this in a rural church, and say ‘right one minute, to the person nearest to you, start now’ and you can see that for a brief moment, quite often for a much longer moment, they hate me. And a minute later ...I say right turn around, do it the other way around and the other half hate me. But when I go back they often say, ‘you made us think I don’t know why I go to church’ and I say ‘well do an Alpha Course, a discoverers Course, a Jesus Discover course, whichever course you like, find out why you go to church and that you are a beloved child of God.’

The Communion therefore must pray, must witness, it must have those who are wise in the world.

We’ll have the Call on Science and Technology tomorrow. How can science serve the Kingdom, rather than the kingdoms of this world, unless we have those who can argue the claims of God based on the gifts God has given us in science and technology?

How can we challenge the selfishness of the richest countries and richest people if we are unable to argue economics in the power of the Spirit, corruption, or decisions on peace and war with an understanding of ethics and what it’s like?

And what it’s like.

Look at the failure to share the Covid-19 vaccine. Now multiply several thousand times to an age to come, when climate change wreaks havoc around the world, where sea levels rise, and the rich are behind armour protected walls? Or will we seek together to do right? It is the churches, acting together, ecumenically, united, that have the global networks to do right. It is the faiths that can lead changes of attitudes. Inspired perhaps by the light of Christ even unknowingly, sometimes.

The Communion must be united in a way that reveals Jesus Christ. The miracle that God has brought about in the church is not that like-minded people like each other, but people who would cross the street, cross the city, cross the ocean to get away from each other learn to love one another. We’re seeing that this week. But to keep it going is difficult. People will say that by being friends of those with whom they disagree we are changing sides; we’re betraying the cause. They said the same to Jesus.

I often joke that if you read John’s Gospel there are only three problems with disunity: First, it hinders our prayers. God says when we’re one at prayer, God says in the scriptures, that God will hear our prayers. Secondly it diminished profoundly our sense of God’s love. God said in the

scriptures than when we're united we will know the love of God. Third it absolutely trips up, and slows down, and sometimes stops our mission and evangelism. The Bible says in John 17:21 that the world will know that Jesus came from the Father when we are one. So, apart from prayer, the assurance of Salvation, and mission and evangelism. Disunity is not a problem.

What David Ford (former Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University) in his 2021 commentary on John which many of you have picked up from the bookstore calls 'the climax of the climax' of the Gospel is that verse 21, dare we contribute to the obstruction of Jesus' prayer? Dare we contribute to the obstruction of God's purpose? We are called by God's grace not by our choice. "You have not chosen me, I have chosen you", says Jesus in John 15:16. Each one of us is chosen not by our will but by God's will. That is extraordinary. God knew whether if we were people of colour, or white, or whether we were gay or straight, whether we were tall or short, whether we gifted or suffering from some kind of disability. God knew all of that. And he chose to call us.

We're not at liberty to choose our brothers and sisters, our siblings. Of course, we have groups with different views. Of course, they are God's gift to us because the different view will often challenge us and changes our minds, it can be prophetic, but we do not, as I said earlier, down the road of expelling other Christians.

We should seek with passion the visible unity of the church. But that is very difficult, as we heard yesterday when we did the call on that we're not even quite sure what that means. Thank you very much to Anne for that extraordinarily powerful presentation.

And belonging to a Church that has people in it, that society does not like. Whether they are prisoners in a long-term sentence or whether they are people who have wrong views from society, as society sees it, about issues of race or issues of war or peace or justice. Be friends with them even when we don't agree with them will get us in all sorts of hot water, will get us into trouble.

Next point. Anglicanism has always seen itself as contingent, temporary, until the visible unity of God's church is re-established. Anglicanism itself is not sacred, for all church institutions are provisional. Only the purpose of God is sacred, eternal and unfailing.

As Christians, our deepest desires as Archbishop Stephen Cottrell of York said earlier need to be to worship and out of that we witness, and to see a world converted. In those intentions we find our call and our future eternally. In those intentions we experience the complications the pain of a world of trial, of trouble and of suffering.

And Peter says:

"after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be power forever and ever. Amen." Chapter 5:10-11.

And eventually, and to your surprise, that brings me to the main point of this address. Oh you're thinking he's gone on for 45 minutes already we'll still be here when he's meant to be giving us supper.

You see, the greatest challenge for me as a Christian or for you, is to "be being" converted. Not to have been converted but to being converted, every day. Conversion of life as Benedict calls it in his Rule. And that takes us to Intentional Discipleship. It means we must be becoming churches that live by what they say and are constantly revolutionary. That is what Bishop Eleanor Sanderson in that magnificent address this morning. Sorry Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia we've just nicked her. My apologies for that. They're not genuine apologies. But it's polite to give apologies and the British never mean what they say anyway.

Bishop Eleanor was challenging us this morning when she spoke of the challenge of nominalism and asked – oh this won't go away from me - "Are we living among some impressive structures but seriously lacking in life?" That sums many churches up, and explains institutional sin and failure.

Revolution means first that our church institutions do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8). That we do not tolerate what is wrong because it fits the culture or we have always done it that way, or because our lawyers say so. We are to remain revolutionaries internally in the Church, radical in our living, faithful in our theology.

Our institutions must conform to the justice and righteousness of God in how we work as organisations. The church visible is I'm afraid to say the church institutional but there is a profound gap between what the church theoretical does in the books and what the institution does in day-to-day life.

For example, in England it means we needed to reorganise safeguarding, it means we needed to look at how our historical resources were invested, we needed to examine and publish the gains we made from slavery after 1704 when we were given the money.

Other Provinces will find internal injustice, lack of mercy, absence of righteousness, tribalism, racism, nominalism that corrodes our passion and desire for Christ.

Externally we are disciples, followers and learners. The tune we sing is the Magnificat. In it Mary, inspired by the Holy Spirit, prophesies and she says this:

He has, God has, shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things,

and sent the rich away empty.

That my dear sisters and brothers is the statement of Revolution not of comfort.

The East India Company which ruled most of India until 1856 and controlled the bits it didn't directly rule banned the singing of the Magnificat at Evensong, for fear that the indigenous people of India might be get the feeling that that God might be on their side, against tyranny. It is a dangerous text.

Let us be clear about revolution. The Church is a place of evolution and of revolution without violence. It is too often mixed-up change with violence. But we are called to set the world the right way up, for the tune to which we dance is to become the tune to which all the world dances. We are those who both call out and demonstrate in our actions the fulfilment of Amos' prayer in Amos 5:24: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Revolution is the impact of the marks of mission on the world. We cannot be silenced God's people cannot be silence, the Church cannot be silenced because we tell of Jesus Christ. We cannot be diverted because we teach discipleship. We cannot be hidden because we tend to the poor and neediest. We cannot be ignored because we transform unjust structures. We cannot be comfortable for our societies because we treasure all of Creation.

We are revolutionaries.

Communism began with a revolution but as an atheist creed it ignored the sinfulness of people and was consumed by the abuse of power without repentance. The Christian revolution must be one of mercy and forgiveness, generosity and engagement. Revolution should be part of the institutional life of those who proclaim Christ. Perhaps, I know that the Secretary General of the Church of England is here, in fact I can see him from here. Perhaps we should have a new department at Church House, Westminster, the department for institutional revolution. I'd love to sell that in the General Synod.

A church that leaves the world unchanged around it has been changed by the world. A church that leaves people unconverted has been converted to the world. A church that neglects its internal justice, righteousness and mercy will live unjustly, ruthlessly and sinfully.

A church that is not a place of peaceful revolution will be a church only of history.

But a church that acts righteously, loves mercy, seeks justice, will find the peace of God, the presence of the Spirit and the call of Christ. A church that gives light to the lost will find light in all its relationships and will live in love. A church of God's revolution will be a church that from generation to generation to generation will see a world transformed.

It has happened before; it is God's grace that will make it happen again. Come Holy Spirit!

Amen

20 min read

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