



"It is wonderful to be with you, a real treat for me to be here, and a privilege to be here because of what Prison Fellowship does and what Sycamore Tree does. I'm particularly grateful to Prison Fellowship for organising it, to the Governor of HMP Brixton for welcoming us here, to Phil Chadder, the Chaplain here, and to the kitchen staff and servers especially, and thank you very very much for what you're doing for us all here today.

"The Clink is a really innovative approach to rehabilitation; supporting those who are here with training, mentoring and qualifications that can help them integrate back into society and employment with greater sense of purpose, sense of self-worth and stability that comes with employment and vocation. That's really important.

"I am really grateful to be invited here today by Prison Fellowship. There are of course longstanding connections between the church and the criminal justice system. Christians have been at the centre of many of the campaigns to improve conditions for prisoners and through the prison chaplaincy system there is a continued commitment to the spiritual and pastoral care of those in prison. And by having the head of the chaplaincy service here today, that emphasises that role. My colleague the Bishop of Rochester is the one who holds the extraordinary title of Bishop for Prisons, but he sadly cannot be with us today, but I'm very grateful for all he does, he's a superb Bishop for Prisons and he works very, very hard on this.

"So why are we involved? Why does it matter? Prison Fellowship is a response to Jesus' call in Matthew 25 to be with those who are in prison. Jesus doesn't say, 'Be with those in prison who don't deserve to be there,' or, 'Be with those who are in prison and are really quite nice under it all' or any nonsense like that. He says, 'Be with those in prison. And the reason is that the heart of the Christian gospel is the idea that everybody needs the presence of Christ in their life. There isn't one of us for whom it doesn't matter. There isn't one of us who in the sight of God is better or worse: as the Bible says, we've all sinned and we all fall short of the glory of God.

"And so the vision for Prison Fellowship, that they "show Christ's love to prisoners by coming alongside them and supporting them", and "that every prisoner has access to support and prayer", goes to the very heart of the idea that the whole person matters and that every whole person matters equally.

"There are Prison Fellowship volunteers in 112 of England and Wales' 136 prisons, and 22,000 prisoners have completed the Sycamore Tree programme, with 125 courses run in 2014-15 across 41 prisons. I've already met some of the people who've been on those courses and I'll meet some more of them during this visit. And I have no doubt that the research currently being conducted by Cambridge University will highlight the effective outcomes in resolving conflict and bringing about restorative transformations and reconciliation, cost-effectively, in a variety of different ways.

"It is encouraging that slowly people outside prison – and most of those involved in the prison service know this very well – that we are beginning to see the mainstreaming of restorative justice as a legitimate, effective and cost-effective means of rehabilitation. . . When we look around and see what faith groups have contributed and continue to contribute, day in, day out, usually voluntarily. . .all the groups represented here do remarkable work and provide much of the underpinning for the work of rehabilitation and restoration. It is really important that they are supported and celebrated in every way possible.

"The motivations for those who oversee the prison service and for our government, who are struggling as all governments always do and always have done – this isn't anything to do with the present situation – they always have to struggle with how they deal with the issues of prison, of matters of crime and so on; it's an incredibly complex problem, no government has ever cracked it, there isn't a simple solution, it comes from human nature. And they have the motivation, quite rightly, that they want lower reoffending rates, they want to reduce pressure on budgets, and they want lots of other things. But the commitment of Prison Fellowship and the other bodies like it around, of prison and community chaplaincies, is to care for all people and for the whole person. To be taken by the words of Jesus, to be compelled by the love of Christ, as St Paul says. And that is the motivation that has more effect than anything else, and it does succeed.

"Change happens when we treat people as people with whom we build relationships. Investing time, energy and resources in the individual offender can lead to the kinds of transformation and reconciliation that other rehabilitation programmes could never achieve.

"And that leads to all kinds of knock on effects that are equally as important.

"Reconciliation within families.

"Reconciliation with ourselves in the face of shame and guilt about the past.

"And most important for every human being, reconciliation with a loving God in the person of Jesus Christ, who died so that we can be reconciled with him.

"So we must do everything we can to ensure that the successes of restorative work are built on and continues to develop. It is a very difficult time for everyone involved in leading the prison service. It's no use pretending that it isn't; they have to take tough decisions, decisions they don't like. But there is, in the kind of restorative justice programmes that are around, the opportunity to offer adventurous, disciplined and careful development of ways to enable people to desist from crime.

"Alongside this work, projects like Angel Tree and Letter Link are so important in helping prisoners maintain links with families, and with people who care about their welfare and their place in the world; and I'm so glad to hear they're expanding in their reach and popularity, and I hope that

more and more people will be involved in that.

"And it's particularly wonderful to be with you during this season of Easter. This year, for some reason, Easter has just come upon me with more joy than for many years. That sense that Jesus is risen from the dead, that death is conquered, and therefore there is no such thing as despair that can overcome us. And that is just wonderful.

"The resurrection of Christ is the hope for our world, because it proclaims that defeat of all that is evil and destroys human nature.

"That hope is something that I pray will continue to expand around the prisons - and that Prison Fellowship, we pray, will be more and more effective in its own role. Whether it is helping run services on a Sunday, supporting Alpha and Christianity Explored, or other similar courses, such as money management, and so much more besides. Thank you for what you do. Thank you for your faith in those who are often forgotten and marginalised. You are an invaluable resource to those you serve. You are an invaluable resource to the criminal justice system and to society at large.

"Thank you very much indeed."

6 min read

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