DIOCESAN SYNOD 2013

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

It’s a privilege to give a Presidential Address at this Synod – and since almost the first task of ministry here was the Diocesan Synod, this is my ninth. I remain daily thankful to God for my calling to serve here. I remain daily mindful of the phrase I found in one of my grandfather’s sermons – ‘heaven is not troubled souls compensated … but a place where cheerful souls receive the crown of glory.’

For me the past year has seen much travel – most recently of course our remarkable visit to Calcutta which you will hear more about shortly. It’s one of the privileges of my life as Primus that I visit other Anglican Provinces in other parts of the world. One of the extraordinary things about the Anglican world is how alike we are – alike in worship and in polity and governance. Everywhere I find the church doing its very best – doing its best with mission in very different contexts – creating a story of God’s calling and trying to live into that. I find the church sometimes facing extraordinary challenges of poverty and injustice. I find the church sometimes stressed by trying to do everything which it feels called to be but with slender resources. I find faithfulness, vision and hope.

I could have stayed at home and found those things. One of the things we need to realise is how much people think about us and how often I find Scottish Christianity buried in the psyche of people in other places. One of our stories is one of extraordinary faithfulness in sustaining the life of our congregations. Another story is of heroic vision and commitment to the journey to which God calls us. Another is the attempt to find our way in the complexities of Scottish society.

We too are stressed. We looked around at our Clergy Conference and noted with sadness that we were missing one third of our stipendiary clergy – some retirements, some long term sickness and some resignations. Behind many of those lie stories of painful difficulty and stories of new hope now emerging. I want to honour the faithfulness of Vestries who have found themselves faced with great difficulties. It has often been difficult – but it has been a privilege to share the journey. I want to express particular thanks to Dean Kenny Rathband who has been at my side through all of this and has been an unfailing support. And I want to thank the clergy – many our retired clergy – who have sustained worship and pastoral care.

Some of that stress arises, I believe, because we have given ourselves to the challenge of growth. To stay in the same place is challenging but not demanding. To try to move forwards is demanding in many ways. But somewhere in this is the prayerful hope that yesterday’s suffering will become the birth pangs of the new.

After lunch, we shall give ourselves to Holy Conversation – conversation not so much about our problems as about what God is doing with us and doing among us. The challenges which we experience are what calls us to that conversation and to prayer – the challenges remind us of our need of God – the challenges help us to hear the call of God.

There are many expressions of thanks which I can and should offer – I’ve already mentioned Kenny our Dean – to that I add our staff in the Diocesan Office, Alicia, Caroline and Sharon. I give thanks for the faithfulness of those who sustain our administrative and committee life. And for those who break fresh ground in mission in the processes of Casting the Net – they show extraordinary energy, determination and vision. And, as I visit congregations on Sundays and at other times, I am thankful for the love which sustains them.

So we now give ourselves to the business of the Synod.