DIOCESAN SYNOD SERVICE 9TH March, 2013

Jesus’ words are hopeful – ‘the fields are ripe for harvesting’. Hope, promise and possibility. I believe that. Even in these unpromising times, the shared work of sower and reaper and the grace of a growth-giving God can produce a harvest. I believe that.

Paul’s words are very similar. There is a mantra in there - ‘I planted; Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.’ We do not manufacture or control the outcome – it would not be good for us. We are fellow-workers with God and with one another. I planted, Apollos watered – we recognise diversity of function, diversity of gifts and skills and diversity of timing.

Let me draw two messages from this. They will be very familiar to all of you. I don’t apologise for re-stating them. It is one of the functions of leadership to state and restate the vision.

The first is about working hard at mission. We keep at Casting the Net and at Mission Action Planning. There is diversity of function – the vision, hope and hard work of people, the pastoral guidance of clergy, the gift of facilitators, the commitment to prayer. I planted, Apollos watered. The question is not ‘Will it work?’ but ‘Will God give the growth?’

The second is about the nature of the community we are in the Scottish Episcopal Church We are called to be more than just members of small and faithful congregations – more than just a distinctive cultural community – we are God’s people for the whole community. We are disciples whom God calls to be his people in a complex world.

This afternoon we shall give ourselves to Holy Conversation – called in some other traditions ‘Conversation on the Work of God. We shall look at Mark of Mission 2 – transformed lives and communities through receiving the Good News of Jesus Christ. If all we are about is surviving for another year, we don’t need very much. We don’t need different people making distinct contributions. We don’t need God giving the growth. We don’t need prayer. We become a church which is hollowed out spiritually from the inside. It survives but it has no soul. It will have just about life to survive but no more.

If we are open to transformation and open to growth, then we appreciate and understand that Paul plants and Apollos waters. We understand that growth comes only from God. We understand that the foundation is Jesus Christ. We understand the importance and the power of prayer. We aspire to be disciples and not just members. We have a soul.

I know that many of you sometimes find the going hard. We’ve had great difficulties this last year or two. I feel it too. But would any of us dare to say that God does not give growth – and in particular, as we move towards the story of the suffering and death of Jesus, that God gives growth which arises out of suffering. I planted, Apollos watered but God gave the growth.