Burravoe Confirmation

I'm delighted to be here today with you today and with Bishop Bob. It's a special day. It's particularly special because of the presence of the other Christian communities here on Yell - expressing by your support what we all share as the wider community of faith

For me this Confirmation Service is about the growth of the church. It's the church doing what it is called to do - adding to the community of the believers. It's the church testing that it has at its heart the ability to kindle living faith in the hearts of people. It's each generation of faith making sure that they are not the last. For if the church loses the will or the ability to bring people to faith, it will die.

Every church has ways of kindling faith - both formally and informally. We do it by example, by teaching and by love. We now call Confirmation 'the affirmation of baptismal vows' - as you will see in a moment, it is something that we all do together. We say together what it is to be a baptised member of the church - to take into the very fibre of our being what the death and resurrection of Jesus mean for us and what the life of the baptised children of God is about

But when we do that in Confirmation - when we make those commitments, they take their place alongside all the great commitments of life - like marriage for example. It's where the fact that you say these things publicly isn't just a statement of what you believe. It is the very act of saying it - of speaking it out - which brings it into being on a new level. You change inside as you speak it - it alters your spiritual DNA

The readings today offered us two ways of understanding what we share today.

If you had been with us in Lerwick on Friday morning, you would have seen Bishop Bob trying on the full costume for Up Helly Ah! - breastplate, helmet and battle-axe. No point looking smiling and gentle wearing that stuff. You have to look fierce. And Bishop Bob is greatly blessed in the ability to look fierce convincingly. So Paul talks about the whole armour of God - about belt of truth, breastplate of righteousness and shoes of the gospel of peace. And along with that shield of faith, helmet of salvation and sword of the spirit which is the word of God.

But where is the enemy? Well the battles are spiritual - sometimes between us and the rest of how things are; sometimes they are struggles for the soul of the Christian community as a place where it is possible to see the presence of the risen Christ; sometimes they are our own inner battles for integrity and love. Let me give you two examples. One is the struggle for truth when it is easier to speak the things which are almost true but not quite - because they are partial, because they are gossip or because they suit our version of how things are. And linked to it is the battle with self-righteousness and self-justification - of course what we think and do is reasonable and understandable. So no need for us to accept any fault or need to be forgiven by others.

That's why Jesus offers another picture of what all this means - it is the living water which is the life of the spirit, the gift of God which we express in the Laying on of Hands. The Affirmation of Baptismal Vows isn't just a commitment which we make and then carry out on our own. The laying on of hands - the prayers which that action focuses and the coming of the spirit which it symbolises - makes clear that we who strive to live our faith do so with the living presence of God in your hearts. It shapes, sustains, moulds, heals. That's where this leads and our prayer is that Gods will will be done in ....