LERWICK

I'm delighted to be with you today to join in giving thanks for 150 years of the life of this congregation. Not many things last 150 years in our times. Particularly not small voluntary groups - which is what churches are. So this is a real moment for thanksgiving and celebration. Alison and I have really enjoyed the couple of days we have spent here with Bishop Bob and Liz and with you. The Flower Festival was wonderful and we were astonished by the quality of the music at the concert, We have been out and about doing a bit of tourism - and the day we spent walking round Noss will long live in our memories.

Many of you will have come to this service with memories and maybe with photos. Those memories will be of ways in which your story - the important moments of your life - are interwoven with the story of this church. You'll think of baptisms, weddings and funerals - of Christmas, Easter and Harvest. You may think of people who are no longer with us - but no less deeply loved in our memories and our hearts.

And of course for every memory which is carried today, there are probably a hundred that we know nothing at all about. And then there is the hard work and sacrifice often unnoticed, unseen, unrecognised and unthanked - the every Sunday and every day faithfulness, steadfast keeping on keeping on and prayerful devotion.

Churches last if they can do that - if they provide a community of loving care and support - if they can wrap deeper meanings around the joys and the sorrows of all of our lives. They need to build ties of affection and respect in the community of churches and in the wider community. And if churches are sometimes pretty poor advertisements for the gospel of love - well they are communities of the baptised who carry the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the brokenness of fallen humanity.

I hope that our friends from other churches will forgive me if I say something about what is a little bit special about the Piskies - sort of genius which makes us distinct. Firstly I think we are a bit edgy. We are not very good at being a traditional institution. We try to be very open to people - to work with people in such a way that we address the realities of their lives. We try to be flexible rather than making people's lives fit what we do.

And then we share with other churches a sacramental approach to life and ministry. You have been exploring that in your flower festival. You may have learnt as a child that a sacrament is an 'outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace'. What that means is that we focus on things we can touch, taste or feel which put us in touch with the deepest things in life - the inexpressible joys and sorrows which are the places where true meaning is found.

We aren't a club or an organisation. We are a living community of faith. We are called to be, as Peter says, living stones being built into a spiritual temple. We are part of a bigger story which is that of how God works out his purposes in and through us. It's a story of vocation - of calling. Not just belonging but being part of. Not just being part of but sharing the truth of God.

This is about our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ. It's about how we fit into the work of Christ and that means that it is ultimately about the fundamentals of the gospel of Jesus Christ - the Jesus of miracles of grace like the feeding of the 5000; Jesus the teacher and healer; Jesus who forgave those who tormented him. In the end it is about Jesus who died and rose again - which brings it back to where it began - to our baptism.

So when the 300th Anniversary comes around, I guess that those who will be here to celebrate will give thanks for what we did and who we were - but they won't know us. But if this church is still here - and it will be - I believe that they will give thanks for our faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God - to whom