Diocese of Calcutta

Sermon at the end of the 200th Anniversary Year

13th December 2015

Most Revd David Chillingworth

Bishop of St Andrews and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church

I am deeply honoured that your Bishop has invited me to deliver the message. This is the day on which the church remembers John the Baptist - the messenger who proclaimed the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This wonderful Service marks the end of the 200th Anniversary Year of the Diocese of Calcutta. We who are here from the Scottish Episcopal Church - together with your ecumenical and other guests - bring the love and the prayers of our part of the world church.

Today we give thanks for the blessings of the past. St Paul says, 'With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.' We also look forward in faith and hope. Jesus says that he is the true vine. When we abide in Christ - when we are truly part of that vine - we bear much fruit. God is the vine grower who prunes the vines, He takes our hopes, our dreams and our visions. He takes the passion and the hard work which we offer. Through his spirit he shapes us to his will. In Christ we become more fruitful in his service.

Bishop Ashoke is the 19th Bishop of Calcutta. Thomas Middleton was the first - consecrated in 1814. He didn't ordain Indians. He found himself as bishop - but he worked with the Chaplains of the East India Company. Yet he planted a vine. He had the vision of a church - as he said - 'built on the labours of ordained converts'. He founded Bishop's College to make a reality of the dream of an Indian Church with indigenous Indian ministry. God made that vision more fruitful.

So we give thanks for the Diocese of Calcutta as it is today. You have a dedicated group of clergy both men and women. You have a wonderful group of laity deeply committed to the ministry of the church. One said to me this week, 'I believe that I am doing God's work and that God is watching over me'. You have schools of extraordinary quality to which people of all communities aspire to send their children - schools in which you teach Christian values. In projects like Dum Dum and Chinsurah, you provide education for the children of the poor - children who otherwise would be fated to repeat the cycles of poverty and deprivation. You are deeply aware of issues around the status and the safety of women in India today. You seek only to be a valued minority community of Christians in a diverse society. Bishop Thomas Middleton would be amazed at all this - and thankful to see the church which he laboured to build now part of CNI - the Church of North India. You set before the world church the vision of organic unity in Christ - in Christ transcending denominational differences,

You have vision and passion. You have worked to do the will of God. God has honoured that, has pruned and shaped it. He has made it more fruitful.

We from Scotland are privileged to be your friends in the Gospel. But we are also part of your story. All around us here are reminders of Scotland. Some of those reminders belong to colonial times. Alexander Duff was the first Church of Scotland - Presbyterian - missionary to India. He was born in Pitlochry in our diocese. He founded Scottish Church College. We also saw his name on the school at Chinsurah. One of the clergy who has travelled with me - Revd Liz Baker - is the present Rector in Pitlochry. Many people in our congregations have links with Kolkata - links of nostalgia and sentiment. When we return to Scotland, we shall see if God the vine-grower will prune - will help us to reshape those connections so that they become more fruitful - fruitful in the living church in India today.

The ministry of Jesus was a ministry of the Kingdom of God. Jesus saw human need in the people he met. He responded to it in the love of God. To us who come to share your life, the problems of this society seem overwhelming Yet in a Christ-like way you respond to human need. You are not preoccupied with status or identity. You give yourselves knowing that in words of St Francis, 'it is in giving that we receive and in dying that we are born to eternal life,

God has blessed you. God has taken your dreams and visions, your passion and your hard work. God the vine grower has shaped your life and ministry to make it more fruitful. As you face the future in faith and hope, you believe that God will continue to be faithful, We do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him'

To him be the glory for ever and ever Amen