HOLY CONVERSATION

DIOCESAN SYNOD 2013

I am going to speak briefly – and you will hear in what I say that the themes of this session have been running through much of the rest of what we have shared today. And in this Holy Conversation session we are going to try and talk about God’s work among us. We don’t all find that easy. I sat a while ago in the STV studios taking part with other faith leaders in an intranet conversation with teenagers all over Scotland. It was fascinating because the ones who spoke lyrically and compellingly about prayer and faith, the beauty and the wonder of God in ways that communicated with young people were the Sikhs, the Buddists, the Moslems … The Christian leaders sounded rather worldly and political. It was challenging.

Throughout 2013, we focus on Mark of Mission 2 ‘Transformed lives and communities through receiving the Good News of Jesus Christ’

If you listen carefully, you will never – well hardly ever – hear me use the word ‘Change’ There are many reasons for that – mainly that it is inadequate to describe what we are talking about. The word is ‘Transformation’ – the scriptural, Pauline word – be ‘transformed by the renewing of your mind’

Transformed means more than changed and more than altered and more than adjusted and more than modified – just to play the Thesaurus for a moment. Transformed means that something happens - we see God in a new way, ourselves in a new way, our world in a new way. And so we act differently and hope differently.

Transformation doesn’t happen just because we want it – and strangely it doesn’t not happen because we don’t want it. I think of St Augustine’s rather plaintive ‘Lord make me good but not yet’ What makes it different is the fact that it is rooted in the Good News of Jesus Christ – in coming to understand what the story of his life, death and resurrection means in our lives.

So Transformation as I understand it is more about becoming than being. It is more about being disciples in the family of God’s people than members of church. More about responding to God’s call than ourselves deciding what to do next. More about feeling passionately and compassionately about poverty, injustice, human suffering than about looking at the world as a spectator.

I’m rather throwing words around because I hope that what I say may find an echo in things which you have experienced in your life of faith, in your congregation or at other times.

I was sitting in a more than averagely difficult meeting last week and I heard what are for me some of the best words I can hear – ‘I’m beginning to get my head around this at last’ What that says to me is, ‘I am beginning to work it out – but it is still ‘work in progress’. It means ‘I have let go of what I first thought and I am open to new possibility.’ I am ready to hear what others say to me – and what God says to me through others.

But there is a health warning. What we are becoming will always be challenging. We become people on a pilgrimage rather than people who have pitched our tents and are staying put. That means that we need the kind of leadership which may offer reassurance but which keeps on saying, ‘Keep going – God is calling us over there’

I am very hopeful – because I hear parts of that narrative all over the place in our congregations and in the diocese. And I hope to hear it this afternoon.