

## Transcript – Week 2 Message from Bishop Richard

Hello everyone. I hope that you are all bearing up in this strange new world. I've certainly been inspired by the stories of creative engagement and pastoral care going on across our diocese. God's people continue to be active and prayerful. Many of you will have found strength and in spiritual music of all kinds.

The Church has a wonderful history of setting biblical texts to music. The rich choral tradition exemplified by our cathedral continues to inspire us. Even in this crisis the resources recorded over many years continue to help us in our relationship with God. Biblical themes also find their way into popular culture. Snippets of biblical stories and metaphor are often not far beneath the surface. Sometimes the music is quite explicit. Some of us will remember Boney M singing 'By the Rivers of Babylon' back in the 70's. If you have the misfortune to find it on YouTube you'll recall why the 70's was truly the decade that taste forgot.

However, the song (which I now can't get out of my head of course) sets to music a Psalm that has especial resonance in these days. *By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion....How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?* Psalm 137 is a cry from the heart in the midst of exile.

For many of us, the closure of our church buildings feels like that. Its hard sitting here in the garden with the cathedral a stone's throw away and not being able to go in. Our churches have been hallowed by prayer for centuries. In some places our ancestors going back generations are buried there. They keep us in touch both with the past and eternity.

We are blessed by our Christendom heritage to have these places. However, for the first 300 years or so of the church the focus of worship and belonging was the household not a building. This is still the case in parts of the world where our brothers and sisters are persecuted for their faith. Faith and community can happen without them. Indeed, you could argue that the greatest expansions of the church, both in its earliest centuries, and in the remarkable growth in China since 1949 owed much to the locus of prayer and biblical engagement being with the individual and the home. I was struck by a quote from a Ugandan refugee at the height of the many conflicts that beset that country, "I didn't realise Jesus was all I needed until Jesus was all I had."

We are in a sort of exile. I understand that for many of our more remote, rural churches the risk of entry is low – but it is not non-existent. Some of our clergy could just step next door to pray, but many can't, not just in our diocese but around the country. This exile is about sacrifice, doing all we can to restrain the spread of this virus and also about solidarity. We



voluntarily exercise self-restraint to stand with brothers and sisters in much more difficult circumstances than ours.

Exile is painful, but it doesn't need to be fruitless. Enforced times of inactivity can be spaces to deepen our prayer life. Once we settle into a rhythm of life after the frantic time of setting up systems and structures we should have some more time for prayer, reading and contemplation. There are loads of resources on the diocesan website for this. We also want to make audio materials available to those who don't have internet access. There is lots of material being broadcast on local and national radio and TV which I'm sure will be helpful. There are going to be 4 acts of worship from the cathedral recorded before the lockdown which will go out on the BBC songs of praise slot. Exiles, don't last forever. This crisis will come to an end. If we use our exile well we could emerge deeper people, closer to God and with a rhythm of prayer to sustain us for the long haul. Do keep safe everyone and may you know God's presence and peace. BLESSING.