

Presidential Address delivered to Diocesan Synod at the church of St Francis, Salisbury on the 20 June 2023

You will be pleased to hear that this Presidential Address, one year on since my first one to you, is not going to be a kind of state of the union version. The focus of this part of our Synod needs to be on our common life, on Making Jesus Known, leading to the Motion which I hope everyone will feel committed to and encouraged by. But before that, we had a real example of Making Jesus Known just two weeks ago, with the mission weekend by Archbishop Justin. What a joy it was. I know of a number of people who came forward asking to be baptised and asking how to become a Christian, and the whole weekend proved to be something we don't do enough of in the Church at the moment: being good news.

It was good to be with Archbishop Justin for the whole three days and to welcome him into our home. I was able to observe close at hand the Archbishop's extraordinary behind the scenes commitment to the Anglican Communion. We need to be praying for him.

I reflected with the home team afterwards on what we all need to be doing differently to make every weekend feel like that one. Much of our vision and strategy is about how can the church be better at what it already does and better organised to live out our calling wherever we are set. These are challenging times and the Gospel message is needed in our communities as much now as ever before.

The Archbishop would be the first to say that the evangelism he led was not just down to him or the office that he holds. But I know he had a great time because he relaxed into being among us and felt at home. This is down to the team that organised the mission on top of their daily duties, and that part of TeamSalisbury was led by Jonathan Triffitt. I ask you, Synod, to show your appreciation for going above and beyond.

Sisters and brothers, I want the Diocese of Salisbury to feel like this:

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:
'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'
(Luke 4.16-21)

This is what we are hoping to live out in our vision and strategy. We have the support of the national Church and the possibility of resourcing. But only we and those we call to Christ will be able to make the difference we strive for in our localities. It is our job description: to be Making Jesus Known.

At the end of the Archbishop's mission, I allowed myself to ask him one question on my heart. He'd been asked lots of questions, especially by young people, all weekend, including the politically sensitive question: 'Do you have a dog.' He does. It's called Bramble and goes under the designation ABCD – ArchBishop of Canterbury's Dog. My question was just as challenging: 'Archbishop, how do you distinguish between truth and noise?' He thought about it for a while and then said, 'Truth is a person, noise is what we make.' Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and that is why I hope and pray we can commit ourselves this evening to making the person of Jesus known. Not our chosen Church styles in this broad Church, not our favourite theological hobbyhorse, not our anxieties - for none of these convert the soul - but the person of Jesus Christ. More and more as I navigate being your bishop, my thoughts and prayers are drawn to the Jesus of the Gospels as my example and guide. What did Jesus say? What did he do? Who did he spend time with? What mattered to him? Did he heal or did he reject? Did he deny or did he wash feet? Did he love and did he die for you and me? The person, this person of the Trinity, is whom we know and who knows us better than we know ourselves.

This person died for us and rose again, and, just like those first witnesses, we need to make his good news known here and now. Making Jesus Known is not a strapline; it's a choice. Our priorities are not a popularity list; they are wounds from which can spring resurrected life. In every thought and every conversation we have from now on, we must ask ourselves individually and in our worshipping communities: are we making the person of Jesus Christ known? If not, then it is about us, noisy us, and that convinces no-one.

I invite you to commit to TeamSalisbury and to Making Jesus Known.