A Cathedral Church’s Calling in Christ

Occasion; Edmonton Clergy conference
Theme; Courageous Anglicans; Every race, tongue & tribe
Brief; Edmonton Clergy conference addressing racial justice.
Time; 10 mins
Readings.

May the words of my inadequate tongue and broken imperfect thoughts be God-breathed to compel your heart. May they reach into your minds and lives and challenge, inspire and nourish as the Spirit wills, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit Amen.

THE …

It has been an extraordinary couple of days Edmonton, and here we are around the table, because we are the one body, about to share the one bread. I don’t know about you, but I am reluctant leave. As excited as I am to step into the trials and tribulations of synod. I arrived on Tuesday wrapped in a thunder cloud, fatigued, frustrated and a little distracted. Many of you have asked me whether I was here to do a session, to share my wisdom, one of your speakers asked me recently at a similar event in Newcastle, ‘if you are not speaking what are you doing here’. I suspect my many may write off any event where I am not contributing significantly in broadcast mode to, as a waste of my valuable time and energy, especially this chaotic week before synod.

But I came to be with you, to talk to you, to get to know you. I came to immerse myself in this extraordinary diocese that holds a great metropolis in its clasp. I came to hear about your deaneries and benefices and parishes and congregations. I came to hear about your youth groups and your pilgrimages, your food banks and the latest crisis in your PCC, I came to hear about your church roof that leaks and the heritage organ that will require you to sell a kidney to restore. I came to hear how everything else you bear on your shoulders impacts and shapes your calling to feed your sheep, your calling to minister to the marginalised. I came to ask about things that bear so heavily on you that it impairs your resources, your time and capacity to flourish in a truly inclusive ministry.

But I also came to share some of my burdens and frustrations with you too, I came to share stories from across the 42 dioceses of courage & catastrophe, of trials and of hope, so that you may be encouraged. Mostly, I came to be vulnerable in your midst and to drink deeply from your passion and joy to disciple, so that we might be restored and consoled in each other, on the one Hope we share.

We have truly communed together this week, and now at the zenith of our liturgy as we eat the Saviours flesh and drink his blood, we are vulnerable together. We have shared our deepest fears, anxieties and frustrations and we are here humbled and naked to each other, unsure on how to navigate this pain and injustice. As Dean Sue said as we began on Tuesday, we were afraid that whatever we may say and do might cause offence or be misunderstood. We are angry that those who cause us pain or accuse us have no idea of the depth and history of that pain. And here we are at the end of our time together, in the unlikeliest of cities at the altar of Hope chapel.
Liverpool, in hindsight was an unlikely place to look for the subversive pedagogy of RECONCILIATION OR antiracism strategy. When I arrived here 25 odd years ago as a young undergraduate, the first impression I had of the city was the rubble. It was my first encounter with European war-damage. The bare shells of row upon rows of condemned Victorian and Georgian buildings awaited their fate, like an effigy of the generations of desperate refugees that had arrived at its ports. At the close of the century, this city found on the life blood of slavery was still rebuilding from war damage, sectarian tensions, and race uprisings.

Listening to Adienka speak about the riches of this city built on the blood of slaves, I thought Bishop Rob had truly found a deep vein of poetic resonance when he brought you on this pilgrimage of reckoning here.

The violence which erupted in the April of 1981, in Brixton as a result of ‘Operation Swamp’, reached Moss Side and elsewhere due to oppressive racialised discrimination1 spilled over to Liverpool by that July, and fused the brimming racial tension in Toxteth. More than 486 police officers had been injured, 70 buildings had been burnt down and the city’s fabric damage caused came to an estimated value of £7.5 million. The city was shaken to the core as more than 500 people were arrested and one killed.2 CS gas had been deployed for the first time in Britain3. Bishops Sheppard and Worlock, alongside local churches and their leaders, stepped in to change a city.4 More than 40 years later, I hope you have reached the same Rubicon. I hope that is why you are here today, to change your city, your diocese, your world.

I must admit that I thought Bishop Rob was pulling no punches in the content. But as I listened to Selena and Harvey and Malcolm and Adienka, I was inspired at its gospel-soaked freshness. Their words were like a new mother’s lullaby to a teething baby. As I absorbed your liturgy this week, I was humbled at the boldness, the humility and the compassion found deep in its Anglican rhythm.

But I know you have only just begun; I know this week created more questions than answers. I know that for some of you it may have merely opened deep wounds, for those of you who are visibly different it may have been painful to have these issues debated and discussed. And for those of you who were discomfited by realities that were set in motion before you were born and even now, you feel is outside your control, for those of you who are not entirely sure what next, I’d like to remind you we are one unbroken family as we gather around this table to eat and drink of our one Hope in him. We will walk together, we will seek each other’s counsel and support, we will weep together we will share our fears with each other. My Edmonton family you will do this together.

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2 Waddington, Marc. "Leroy Cooper: The Toxteth Riots were a wake-up call and did some good", Liverpool Echo. Retrieved 27 June 2012.
And that is not a cop-out, or an easy answer. We know it feels like an impossible task, but we are called by a God of the impossible. It is easy to be cynical, and I often give into my deep veins of cynicism.

**THIS WORLD THAT SUITS YOU SO WELL...**

If you ask, how do we preach the gospel to the poor, or heal the broken hearted. How do we invite in those ostracised because of their race? I know it is easier said than done. Why should the poor or the bruised or broken listen to you, or to me.

Or for those more philosophical about this, *why should the broken and bruised, the marginalised or oppressed, listen to this God or this Carpenter who claimed to be the Christ who spawned some sort of insane cult that has survived 2000 years.* That branded an empire that bought and sold lives and made human bodies cargo. This all powerful omniscient, omnipotent being that we can’t begin to understand, or narrate, who apparently at the dawn of the species sent us packing out of the comfort of Eden, *because we sought knowledge*, however you might understand, that. Why should, why would …the powerless …listen… to such extraordinary power, or anything vaguely associated with that power.

To express love, *God gave up power*, to heal the broken hearted, *he allowed his heart to be broken*, to free the captives, he allowed himself to be captured, to heal the bruised, he was battered and bruised, and he descended *even unto hell*. He took on our sin and our pain so that he might know that pain in powerlessness and thus became the wounded healer.

In my role as the archbishops’ advisor on race, I often share; that if we make our churches exclusive, a place where the marginalised and oppressed do not find a home in, that we might become no more than a Sunday matinee for an elite thespian guild. Or as someone put it, the most expensive state sponsored costume drama. And that the marginalised may say to us, “Why should we believe you, why should we believe in this unseen kingdom you call us to put our trust in, why would you change a world that suits YOU so well. A place you have made a weaponised fortress against us.”

How do we respond to that? Now, I am not suggesting the world is a binary, and some of us the oppressed, and some the oppressor, life is sadly much more complicated than that. But in almost every context you are in, you have a choice about who you protect, who you identify with, who you are in solidarity with.

I pray that you will hear your calling and vocation to always seek company and fellowship with the broken and the bruised, the hungry, the weeping, the marginalised and oppressed, the lost and the hopeless, so that you might hear the soft whisper of the Comforter around them. Because that is where the Comforter dwells. That you might catch a glimpse of that coming kingdom, because that is where you might find it. *And when we gather in His name MAY OUR lives be so saturated in the Spirit, that the winds of the Comforter blow throughout all those about us, in that incredible Grace.*
THE SENDING OUT..

Thank you again and may the Man of Sorrows who promised us that the very stones would cry out, if we fell silent, use your soft hearts, acute intellects, strong stomachs and indomitable spirits, to continue to preach the gospel and speak for the oppressed. May you always carry the light of the Transfiguration in your heart and the fire of the Pentecost in your lives. And may the Spirit communicate the Grace of the Divine intervention through the brokenness of your lives and the gratitude of your heart. AMEN

In the Name of the Creator, the Christ and of the Comforter, Amen.