**DIOCESAN SYNOD, 2 April 2022**

**Bishop Jonathan’s Presidential Address**

Come Holy Spirit, kindle in us the fire of your love. Amen

Before moving to the diocese from York, a good friend asked in a wonderfully direct way: “So Jonathan, what is the *wolf at the door* for the Diocese of Portsmouth?”.

A great question. In other words what is the most pressing or urgent, immediate or threatening issue or risk we face in this diocese? I wonder how you would respond? I’d like to offer you my own early reflections.

Some of you be aware that through the careful planning of lay chairs, area deans and archdeacons, I’ve managed to visit our seven deaneries. It’s been an opportunity for me to meet some of you, and to begin listening, engaging and being curious about what’s already been happening in the company of the Spirit. So, after a deanery tour, what’s the wolf at the door?

Is it the invasion of Ukraine?

We might well say that the invasion of Ukraine is a wolf at the door for all of us. If it’s not, then we might say it *ought* to be: not thinking of ourselves but lifting our eyes to the world God loves so much. Surely we’re right to see the invasion as a wolf at the door, as we think of the 2.5 million refugees, millions more displaced people: men, women and children fleeing violence and the brutality of an evil and indiscriminate artillery campaign, an invasion that is unjustifiable at every level. I think our Archbishops were right to call it evil.

So is Ukraine the wolf at the door?

In some ways yes, for some of the things that matter most in our societies for so many – freedom of speech, the rule of law, international co-operation. At a time when the nations need to be co-operating more than ever to address climate change, poverty and inequality, the invasion and its human cost is a disaster.

So pray for those caught up in this awful invasion and its aftermath, give as much as you are able to, reflect deeply on the gift of freedom that we enjoy. I want to thank Nick Ralph for doing swift and helpful work in partnership with Citizens UK to open the door for us, if we are thinking we would like to host refugees. Do be in touch with him; and do look at [yesterday’s eBulletin](http://www.portsmouth.anglican.org/ukraine).

Safeguarding matters were not thought through adequately in the government’s scheme. That is unacceptable. Without good safeguarding, we ought to pack up and stop what we are doing. Promoting a safer church and a culture in which all are welcomed safely is at the heart of our life together, as we live pray and serve God’s Kingdom. We are called together to work unstintingly to make our communities the safest they can be. For everyone. That is always first priority for me.

So is the invasion of Ukraine the wolf at the door? While we need to turn our prayers and eyes to it, not flee from it, I don’t think it’s the wolf at the door for the Diocese of Portsmouth.

Is the need to promote a safer culture the most urgent issue? The wolf at the door?

Is it PCR2, the second round of checking our files and the way we’ve handled safeguarding in the diocese? We do have challenges to face.

Already I have met [our new safeguarding manager] Emily Hassan. At our first meeting, Emily challenged my own safeguarding leadership and practice; I will clearly have to raise my game. As with everything else in the life of discipleship and in seeking and serving the Kingdom, we are ‘works in progress’. But it’s not always easy or comfortable to hear where we need to grow and do better! I’ve had my first uncomfortable conversation with Emily. She will be a gift to us if we can welcome her directness. But, for me, it’s not PCR2 that is the wolf at the door for the diocese.

Is it resources? Not enough finance, not enough people, not enough energy? ‘All of these to feed and only five loaves and two fishes’. Those of you who met me ‘on tour’ will know that I’ve talked about my mother. Jean died shortly before my installation. I took her funeral on the Wednesday before the Saturday I started here with you.

Nine of her grandchildren said a few words at her funeral, and they all started with: “I was Nanny’s favourite grandchild”. All of them! Two had private words with me. Both said: “The others were joking, but I really was Nanny’s favourite!”

I think what my mother managed to do was to communicate the love of the triune God, which is never limited. We live in a scarcity culture, driven by economics. Economics text books will describe the discipline as the distribution of *scarce* resources.

The Church lives in a world like that, but we don’t live only in that world. We dance to a Kingdom tune, and to another vision, where the love of God is always more than we can ever ask or imagine. We, as we are – not as we might be, not if we try harder, not if we stretch resources more thinly – we are enough. And God is always sufficient.

So: it’s not for me *Ukraine* or *PCR2*, though both should command our attention in the days ahead. It’s not *resources*, although we will need to get a budget in November, and a three-year framework, not least because we want to open up our life, start appointing people and continuing to do the work of the Kingdom in the community – that’s our calling. But it’s not scarcity.

I just want to return to tiredness. How wonderful it is that you all kept turning up during lockdown and the pandemic, that you kept praying and somehow offered to your communities and networks the love of Christ, in the midst of a disturbing time. We sometimes forget, when we are caring for others, that we too have been through a pandemic, and all of that worry and anxiety. So I want to say thank you.

Tiredness might lead you to say: “I can’t bear another initiative or to start anything again.” Well, the good news is that I don’t want you to start anything again. I want us to go on together and to receive what God has done in days past with thanksgiving; and see where the Holy Spirit is beckoning us in the days ahead. It’s all about gathering the fragments, as in John 6: perhaps we thought our work was wasted, or lost or undervalued – and then in the presence of Jesus, you discover that even in the things that didn’t go well, there was life and light, possibility and abundance.

Some of the tiredness may come from frustration.

As I have gone around, I’m aware that not everything that was done in the strategy worked in the way that those with good intention, good hearts and prayer hoped it would. And that’s left some people feeling that they’ve done deanery plans that haven’t been implemented, that they’ve been asked to move towards *structures* too quickly, when what we need is conversation and dialogue – and a plan and a direction and courage, and a willingness to sacrifice, but a little more time together. I’ve heard you and I’ve heard that.

I find Live Pray Serve a most spacious way of thinking about our vocation as a Church; but I wonder whether it’s a vision? In fact, I don’t think it is a vision.

It’s more of a framework for our lives – to live, pray, serve the Kingdom. But what we need together is to find a vision. Is the need to find an integrated and inspiring vision the wolf at the door? The most pressing issue? To find a vision that will integrate, draw us out, draw us together, enable us to make the tough decisions together. Though vitally important and significant for us, I don’t think vision, or the lack of it, is our wolf at the door.

So is it a generation who do not know the love of Christ that has encountered us, changed us, transformed us and held us? Is this the wolf at the door, is this the thing that needs our most immediate attention? It’s a huge question, and of course you will all know that it’s close to the heart of things for me. But I don’t think it’s *the* wolf at the door. So what is it, if it’s not all of these important, significant things?

I think our wolf at the door is a lack of trust – broken trust in some cases and quarters. We lack confidence in one another. The Latin word is *confidere* – with faith, with trust, trusting together. Trusting together that there is hope and light and a direction that we can all get behind. But in, with and under the question of broken trust is the deeper question of confidence in Jesus Christ. Is Christ enough? And are we enough for the ministry to which he calls us?

Here’s the wolf at the door, the real threat: that we lose confidence in Christ’s beckoning and sufficiency, in his call. If we lose confidence in Christ, we can sometimes find ourselves thinking that the work of the Kingdom must be down to *us*: “is the future of the Church, is the hope of the Church down to us?” I want to say absolutely not, as clearly as I can, otherwise we really are in trouble! The future and the hope of the Church – and of the world – is Jesus Christ, risen, in our midst, alive and at large in the world, and beckoning us to join in. Beckoning us, not to see ourselves as having our *own* ministries, but rather receiving the gift through the Spirit of participating in *his* ministry.

I enjoyed my first licensing on Wednesday night – Adam Tams [as associate area dean of Portsmouth]. I have never licensed anyone standing before me in stripey socks, and without shoes. When I handed the licence over, I said: “Receive this ministry, which is both yours and mine – and *his before ours*.” Those three words are crucial in starting to restore confidence. It’s not all down to our efforts.

Rather, we are asked by a gracious God to take on his yoke, which isn’t the same yoke that others may be telling us we need to take on and try harder with. His yoke is easy. It’s got enough challenge for a lifetime, but if it’s his yoke we are bearing, then we share in his work, with his resource. And through the Spirit, Jesus Christ will lift us when we fluff our lines, when we lack confidence, and when we look back, rather than side-by-side to each other, at the great gifts he has already given us in each other.

So would you pray about how we build confidence; and would you remember those three words “his before ours” and “his before yours”? It may be that as we come into Holy Week and Easter, we may need a bit of debt release, some forgiveness. You may be one of those who felt they offered a lot which hasn’t really been received, heard or listened to.

As I join in with all you are and do here, in the company of Christ, there is much to celebrate. But I think there’s a bit of debt release, some forgiveness to face and to pray about – a willingness not to be offended, a willingness to lay aside some of the hurt and the wounds, so that Christ may call us together in love and service, and in mutual challenge.

Mutual challenge is hard enough! But it’s made even harder, and it’s made something that is not of the Kingdom, when that challenge is freighted with anger and bitterness and history and a whole backstory. None of us can deal with that lot when it comes our way. What we can deal with is criticism, the perspectives of other, the help of a brother or sister to see things differently, to be challenged and loved. These things we need more and more.

So in conclusion, I call the diocese to join me in prayer at the Chrism Eucharist in Holy Week; to return to the Lord in love and trust, to bring to Christ all of our hurts, disappointments, frustrations and broken narratives. Whatever the story, if this is how you feel, that you haven’t been heard or that things haven’t been quite right, bring it to the Lord, and to the foot of the Cross, in Holy Week.

Make this your Holy Week work in the presence of the Spirit. That in God’s good time, we may emerge healed and whole, ready for all God calls us to, wherever possible. For Christ calls us to pick up the cross. But not a cross we choose for ourselves, but the cross he chooses for us, and that he will carry with us. That’s a cross we can bear together to his glory.