

What's the wolf at our door?



BY BISHOP JONATHAN, BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

A FRIEND asked me: “What’s the wolf at the door in the Diocese of Portsmouth?” It was a great question and helped me to think about the most pressing, urgent issue we face together – the thing we need to address right now.

Is it Ukraine? The millions fleeing the brutality of an indiscriminate artillery campaign? Of course that matters hugely, and our generous churchgoers are doing all they can to host refugees displaced because of an unjustifiable invasion.

Is it safeguarding? This is undoubtedly an incredibly important priority and I know I must raise my game so that our churches are as safe as possible.

Is it resources? Not enough finance, people or energy? Again, this is important, but as Christians we don’t live only in a world constrained by economics – we dance to a Kingdom tune where the love of God is always more than we can ever ask or imagine.

Is it our vision and strategy? I recognise the frustration that not everything in our Live | Pray | Serve vision has worked in quite the way that those with good intentions hoped it would. Some may feel we’ve been asked to look at new structures without enough time for dialogue. I’ve heard you on that.

In fact, I think the wolf at our door is a lack of trust and confidence in

one another. And under that 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 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. I want to say absolutely not! The future of the Church – and the world – is Jesus Christ 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 receiving the gift through the Spirit of participating in his ministry.

So I call the diocese to join me in prayer: 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.

Let’s pray 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.

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