

‘Take me to the alley’



BY BISHOP JONATHAN, BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH

ONE of the joys in my life is music. I wonder if this is true for you too?

Each day, at the end of Morning Prayer, we often listen to a piece of music or a song to gather things together. In this context, a song written and sung by the American jazz singer Gregory Porter has been significant, a track to which I return regularly. I commend it warmly to you.

It was written in New York. Its inspiration draws from Pope Francis and the compassionate faith of Porter’s late mother Ruth. The track is called *Take Me to the Alley*. It has a simple storyline. A neighborhood prepares for a royal visit. And so, in Porter’s words, ‘they line the sidewalks/with every sort of shiny thing.’ But, against all expectation, when the King arrives, it continues:

They will be surprised
When they hear him say
Take me to the alley
Take me to the afflicted ones
Take me to the lonely ones
That somehow lost their way
Let them hear me say
I am your friend
Come to my table...

It’s a beautiful song. It’s influenced by the story of the Christlike God who, in Jesus the King, meets us in humility and who lives – in manger and cross, in word, deed and his priorities – the presence of God’s Kingdom.

In the autumn, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, will make a brief visit to our diocese between Friday 13 and Sunday 15 October. With limited time and a thousand options, where will the archbishop be encouraged to visit? Not simply to the churches, surely, but to the ‘alleys’: to the afflicted, the lonely, to those seeking faith, forgiveness and a sense of purpose; to those whose service to society is costly and hidden.

Of course, the itinerary includes some church-based visits. For example, Archbishop Justin will help celebrate a century of Christian witness for one of our communities, he will encourage our wonderful band of Anna Chaplains, and participate in pioneering worship which serves ‘unchurched’ children, young people and their households.

However, the visit will also take Justin, and the gospel message that burns so brightly in his heart, beyond the well-established ‘sidewalks’ of church life into secondary schools, to meet the Royal Navy and to give quality time to the prison community at HMP Isle of Wight.

So do pray for Justin, our Archbishop: that his visit will encourage him and all he meets. And do look up that song; it could change your world.

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