

Diocesan Synod Presidential Address: June 2017

I am annually disappointed by the alacrity with which we move away from Trinity Sunday. We kept it as a Festival last Sunday but on Monday morning we assigned it to the past. No octave, not even the Collect remains to be used for the rest of this week. In this Address I want to break with convention and hold our focus for a moment longer on the Trinity. In celebrating God the Holy Trinity we celebrate mutual self-giving in relationship as divine, beautiful, and transformative for us. We proclaim not only as doctrine but as a glorious truth that mutual generosity in relationships is fundamental to God and to us. In a world, nation, communities and our own lives where fracture and division is all too prevalent, that comes as a truth that is both good news and also a challenge.

That said the direction I had intended to take in this Address has been modified by the challenging events of recent weeks. The Manchester concert bomb, the London Bridge van and knife attack, and the tragic fire in North Kensington are signs of a society not at ease with itself, and these appalling events follow the Westminster car and stabbing attack in March and the murder of Jo Cox MP just a year ago. While the Westminster, Manchester and London Bridge outrages were terrorist incidents, the tower block fire gives a glimpse of what is good and not so good in our society.

It is too early to attribute responsibility or blame, though accusations abound and important questions about priorities must be addressed, about the circumstances which allowed the carnage to happen or what was not done in the recent refurbishment which might have prevented or reduced the loss of life. But we have heard of the virtually unanimous agreement that the diversity of people and families in the 120 flats were from a wide variety of backgrounds and circumstances living side by side with respect and in harmony. The photos and stories make that clear. The wider local community has generously offered space, food, clothing, friendship and solidarity as we have

movingly witnessed. In the distress and grief there's a least a little to honour and cherish. These are from our Christian perspective, Godly, and examples of mutual self-giving in relationship. When we are often preoccupied with division and conflict it is good to be reminded that difference does not dominate and that people find peace, happiness and unity in what distinguishes them but does not divide them.

All this comes just after the period we have prayed between Ascension Day and Pentecost, Thy Kingdom Come. The Archbishop's initiative was spear headed in this diocese by a group of those very new to licensed Reader or ordained ministry, indeed some still in training on our Portsmouth Pathway, with the more experienced support of Neil Pugmire, our Communications Officer and Jo Spreadbury, Canon Precentor at the Cathedral. Their energy, enthusiasm and skill in offering the diocese a preparation and ideas day in our Cathedral was beneficial and inspiring. I was encouraged to hear from many lay and clergy of their plans and initiatives to encourage people to pray for the coming of the Kingdom. That is vital and sets the frame in which our worship, witness and service are set. We offer this not for church but for the Kingdom.

Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done. For us to make a difference and for God's will and way to come, we have to work together in relationship. Christians, worshipping God the Holy Trinity, have a responsibility to do this. When we pray the Lord's Prayer we probably hardly notice the significance of its phrasing. When I was growing up there was much less emphasis than today on the congregation and indeed the church as a community. Although we said it together we proclaimed a personal creed, 'I believe in God'.... By contrast the Lord's Prayer began and begins 'Our Father who art in heaven' and we pray 'give us this day our daily bread'. It is explicit that our prayer for the coming of the Kingdom and our work for God's will to be done is our shared work. We pray not for ourselves alone but to the God who is the Father of all. This is much more radical and inclusive than

the Peace we share at the Eucharist. That is homely and domestic, in some instances so much so that to be an outsider or visitor in a congregation it can be prolonged and excluding as people greet just about everyone in church, it sometimes seems, with affection. Having often found it difficult to embrace this innovation in worship when launched in the days of Series 2, with Series 3 adding the tucked away rubric that the words may be accompanied with a handclasp or similar action, we are now capable of over-doing it. At its best the Peace speaks of our desire to minister in relationship with each other in the Body of Christ. The Our Father specifically widens our privilege as Christians to seek the flourishing of all; Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth. That is our vocation – Living, Praying, Serving.

Many of us, perhaps particularly in positions of leadership and authority, can find it tough to work with others. Just as in government it is important that there is collective responsibility and shared decision making so if the Kingdom is to grow and come then we need to do better at mutual self-giving in relationship and be at peace with each other so that we can be effective in sharing that in the world. It is not Godly, after the pattern of the Holy Trinity, to find it difficult when others have what we strangely choose to call success. Whether that is a better choir, a newer kitchen, a larger congregation, a curate, or whatever we begrudge even a little in others, it doesn't reflect well on what our understanding of God the Holy Trinity is like. God must be the model, the pattern, the icon for us.

There is so much in the life of this diocese in which I rejoice and which I think very many of us welcome. We are small enough largely to know each other - though I long for the day when there are so many more of us that intimacy is harder than at present – we are nimble and often innovative and creative, we have a strong sense of interdependence. There is a strong sense of common purpose and a flexibility which enables living, praying and serving in response to God's call, the

needs of our communities, and to build the Kingdom. So I urge you today not to leave Trinity Sunday in the past. Mutual generosity in relationships is God. Let it be us too.