**DIOCESAN SYNOD, PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS**

**November 2023**

After the unspeakably wicked and evil violence of Hamas, the news that we are receiving now is truly shocking. The Israeli state responded after that violence, as international law says it may, and perhaps must. But we have seen actions move into a new phase of indiscriminate violence against vulnerable non-combatants, violence that over-does and over-reaches.

It is for this reason that, under the leadership of Archbishops Justin and Stephen, our House of Bishops has published a statement calling for peace, which you can read [here](https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/press-releases/statement-house-bishops-war-gaza). We long for a ceasefire, but we have called – as the United Nations continues to call – for humanitarian pauses in the violence so food and drugs and fuel and hope can pour in.

I’m mindful of the Psalmist’s phrase in Psalm 94: ‘When I thought: “My foot is slipping…”’ – and we can see, we know, that ‘feet are slipping’ in various ways as we meet together this morning.

I think of the Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza, which was bombed with so many deaths. We can ask whether it was by a rocket from Hamas that misfired, or whether it was launched by the state of Israel, but these kind of questions lose their value or meaning when violence has become indiscriminate in any case. The hospital, once run by the Baptists, has been part of the mission and ministry of the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem for a long time.

A friend of mine, Canon Richard Sewell, is the Dean of Jerusalem. I have been in touch with him and asked what we could do to help in this situation. He encouraged us as a diocese to pray, and asked us to support the hospital – even before part of it was razed to the ground. We know this is a time when we are strapped financially: but do pray and do support the appeal financially if you can. The details are [here](https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/24666#!/DonationDetails). Our brothers and sisters in Jerusalem will make sure the money goes to where it needs to be directed.

There are other ways in which feet are slipping, such as the Covid inquiry. You couldn’t make up some of the things they’ve been hearing. This isn’t a total response to the issue, but *one* of the things I’ve been appalled at the misogyny of some of those messages that have now been made public. The way that women are spoken about by some in government is totally unacceptable.

We may think of ‘feet slipping’ as we prepare to consider a challenging budget as a Diocesan Synod today. And we continue to remember those who are the most deprived among us, who are slipping out of sight and hope, slipping out of any way forward, as prices rise and people have to choose between heating and eating (it sounds trite, but it’s true for so many of our people, whom we are called to love and serve in Christ’s name).

Those of you who have been in my kitchen will know we have a notice over the door which says: ‘Remember: as far as anyone knows, we’re a nice, normal family’. Two stories from the time when I was leaving Southampton. A gentleman visited. Sitting in my study, I asked how he was. He put his head down and said: ‘it’s a bit of an opera at home.’ At that very moment, we heard my daughter telling her mother exactly what she thought of her, and I was able to say: “It’s a bit of an opera here too.”

Shortly afterwards, while one of our boys was at home, the other returned home. The door bell rang, the front door opened and from my study – where I was deep in conversation with someone who’d come to visit – I heard a noisy greeting, the unmistakable sound of bodies physically clashing followed by two six-foot plus boys ‘going to ground’ in the hall. I opened the door to ask them to quieten down, and they were there wrestling in front of us.

‘Remember: as far as anyone knows, we’re a nice, normal family’. It’s actually OK for us as Christians to live lives that involve wrestling, struggling with things. Sometimes it will all come out wrong, and we’ll feel we’ve said the wrong thing, at the wrong time. But this is who we are. We are the people whose feet will slip from time to time.

But where does the Psalmist go? This is where I want us to go in this Eucharist as we pray for the world, as we break bread and meet Jesus again. I want us to return to that ‘place of returning’ the Psalmist knew in all his or her vulnerability and brokenness. The place that prompts the lines: *“When I thought, "My foot is slipping", your steadfast love, O Lord, held me up. When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.” (Psalm 94: 18-19)*

My dear brothers and sisters, as we meet in Synod, be cheered by the Lord and cheer one another in the Lord’s presence. Encourage one another to fix our eyes continually on Jesus, on the one who is word made flesh, God’s consolation for the world in person, the peacemaker who comes to build a community of peace.

It is important when there is wrestling in the hall, to name it, to challenge it, to stop it, because we are called to be makers of peace, not bystanders; people who will speak up, not those who will keep silent at injustice. Knowing myself as perhaps I’m coming to know some of you, we know this is not in our own strength, but this is the calling of the risen Lord. We are called to follow him in the world, to create a community of love and reconciliation in all our difference with him at the head, that the world may taste and see, may be consoled in its griefs, and may be given a vision of the peaceable Kingdom.

Bishop Jonathan