



Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Patronal Festival Eucharist on All Saints' Day

readings: [Daniel 7.1-3, 15-18](#), [Ephesians 1.11-end](#), [Luke 6.20-31](#)

30 October 2022

On All Saints Sunday and our Patronal Festival our readings appropriately offer us a vision of the people of God.

In the puzzle that is the prophet Daniel the Holy Ones of God, earthly and heavenly, receive the kingdom and possess it whilst the four great beasts - successive kings oppressing the peoples of the earth – are defeated.

In the breathless sweeping vision of the apostle Paul, he gives thanks for the Ephesians' love for all the saints. He grounds his vision for the church in the seal which all Christians receive at baptism, the down-payment of the Spirit, guaranteeing our share in the body of Christ on earth and in heaven.

It's St Luke who brings us down to earth and focuses us on the practicalities and challenges of following Jesus: 'love your enemies, do good to those who hate you'. It's a vision of a church that models the incarnation to the world, it's a vision of God's kingdom community.

This is my third Patronal Festival, and it feels rather different to the first two. The task of recovering well from COVID continues – and I say this knowing that the COVID story is not yet over - but it does now feel as though Cathedral life is opening up, as though I am experiencing the cycle of the Christian year in Derby Cathedral for the first time.

943 is the official founding date for the Collegiate Church of All Saints, although historians tell me that it was twenty years earlier that the first church was founded on this site. For eleven hundred years there has been a worshipping community in this place. It has been a place where the holy ones of God have gathered, where baptism has ushered generation after generation into the promises of the kingdom, where the demands of Luke's Sermon on the Plain have been lived out. Today there is much about our inheritance to celebrate, not least becoming a cathedral some 95 years ago.

But a Patronal Festival is most of all an opportunity to take stock of the present and look towards the future and to do so with energy and a lively faith, anticipating God's work in and through us.

Over these past months Chapter has been sharing its vision for the future of Derby Cathedral with you the worshipping community and we have begun to share it with our many stakeholders. Together with the Bishop of Derby and with the Diocese of Derby we share the passion that the kingdom of God 'is good news for all'; and we offer the Cathedral's resources for mission and ministry to contribute to the diocesan vision.

How we do this is summed up in our purpose statement. 'To be a place for all to explore faith, life and heritage: a place of light, beauty and innovation, offering sanctuary, grounded in God's unconditional love revealed in Jesus Christ'. This is already proving to be a rudder as we enter the uncharted waters before us, knowing our direction of travel but not the route we will take on our journey towards our vision for the future.

And the vision we have is this: through the experience of light, beauty, innovation and sanctuary – all experiences of this Cathedral Church and which speak to us of God revealed in Jesus - we wish to enable many to experience God's kingdom. By participating in worship and music that inspires; by engaging with the depths of the Christian faith and finding this a place in which it is safe to learn; by becoming a partner with the Cathedral community; by the experience of art and culture, through the sharing of our remarkable

yet often hidden heritage, we pray many will find the kingdom of God and a living relationship with Christ for themselves.

There are six million people who live within one hour's drive of Derby and who have never come for a visit. There are many who live in the Diocese of Derby and who have not yet visited their own Cathedral. This is our simple, but effective vision for the future: that many more will come to experience God through the light, beauty, innovation, and sanctuary that Derby Cathedral offers.

Our future does not come neatly packaged, waiting for us to tear open the wrapping paper and see exactly what this Cathedral is going to be like in five years' time. There is much conversation and listening to feedback to come; experimentation with new ideas, dialogue with our partners and funders, and dare I say, hard work by us all to envisage and drive the changes that are required to make this vision a reality.

We will work with the big themes that lie within the vision. For example, we will learn how to become a truly inclusive community. We are to be a Cathedral for all – accessible to those with disabilities both visible and invisible, deeply inclusive to all ethnicities of whatever race or background, committed to the equality of those who self-identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community. Becoming a diverse and inclusive Cathedral, a Cathedral for all, must be one of our priorities so that we serve effectively the kingdom of God.

We have set ourselves some challenging goals, and our plan will unfold through some distinct phases. We face some key challenges in the way this Cathedral building works for us; not least, it is unsustainable financially and a key part of our strategy is to find a different ordering that will serve the Cathedral community, the Diocese, our City and County even better than we do at present. There are some big decisions coming our way. But having a strategy for the future, a way of telling the story of our aims and objectives, a way of linking up the whole of cathedral life for the kingdom of God is an essential tool that already is beginning to help Chapter think differently about the future.

But you might ask? Why do we need to talk of change, and quite radical change at that? Why not aim for stability in a world that is experiencing turbulence whichever way we look – politically, economically, culturally, and environmentally?

The reason is that God is always calling his church - and cathedrals as they play a particular part in the church's mission - to re-shape, to re-adjust, to proclaim afresh God's kingdom, to meet the challenges of a particular moment in time. In this respect not only is the church the heavenly body of Christ but it is incarnated in flesh and blood amidst a world in which change is the only constant.

As so often is the case, it's Luke who names the kingdom of God and helps us understand why change is a necessary part of being church. The twelve apostles have just been commissioned for a future role they were barely able to imagine.

Little did they realise that they were going to be servants of the kingdom of God. God would be ahead of them every step of the way, active through the Spirit giving birth to new kingdom communities in every place in the known world. The apostles' job was to catch up with God and cooperate with whatever God was already doing. They were to be partners with God in the changes that would inaugurate the kingdom of God for their time and place.

And this is why Jesus puts emphasis on the Beatitudes. 'Blessed are you who are poor, who are hungry now, who weep now, who are hated on my account'. It is why the beatitudes are accompanied by the Woes. 'Woe to you who are rich, who are full now, who are laughing and who are spoken well of'. Blessings and woes go together and help us grasp God's project and his purposes in the world.

This doesn't mean that God deals unjustly with those who are well off, only that God's commitment is first of all to the poor; God's vision is to act on behalf of the poor and not on behalf of the rich and powerful. Those who are poor know their need of God and are the ones who benefit from God's intervention in the world. So much so, that by the time of Jesus, discerned clearly by Luke, the prophets of Israel saw the nation itself as the poor, waiting patiently for the only means of salvation that they had.

This is where St Luke's great insight comes from: that the kingdom of God is God's act of salvation which turns the world upside down, and such a reversal is the great theme that shapes his Gospel from start to finish. The poor will become rich, the hungry will be fed, those who weep shall laugh, those who are excluded because they follow the Son of Man will be included.

It might be better to say that God's project of salvation – the redemption of our souls and bodies, our hearts and minds, our families and communities, of those structures in our world that oppress and disadvantage those on the downside – God's project of salvation, is better described as setting a world that is upside down, the right way up!

That is why we are invited by Jesus not to hate our enemies; because to love them is to imitate the example of Jesus who in the suffering of the cross, loved those who hated him to the end, absorbing the evil and violence of this world with compassionate love. And this is the only thing that can change the human heart; otherwise there would be no transformation, no salvation for a world that is upside down.

And that is the project we aim to be involved in as a Cathedral Church. God's project of love that transforms the human heart and that reverses the values of this world, setting the world the right side up. This will be our benchmark for knowing whether we are heading in the right direction as we allow ourselves to be guided by the vision God has offered to us, a vision of being his people in this place and throughout the world, now and for eternity.

**The Very Revd Dr Peter Robinson,
Dean of Derby.**