



Jonathan Cherry

**The Archbishop gave his annual keynote address on reconciliation at King's House in London yesterday. Speaking to a gathering of educators, youth workers, Christian leaders and others working directly with young people, the Archbishop stressed the importance of empowering young people to become leaders who can build peace in their communities.**

***Read the Archbishop's speech in full:***

Ten years ago I was in the southern part of the Sudan, not in South Sudan but the South of Sudan. There were refugees moving through, in the place where we were. And we met a group of them and stopped to talk. Among them was a seven-year-old boy, who'd lost his parents and his family as they fled the violence. If he's alive, he'd be 17 now. I remember looking at him and seeing this absolute sense of being alone. In a landscape with strangers he'd never met, and he was called to know them and to follow them and to trust they'd do something good for him. I don't know what happened to him.

For every generation, whether they know it or not, there is a new challenge and there is a new message from God in Jesus Christ. Parts of that message are always the same: God says you are loved so much that I died for you so that you can be reconciled to me, to yourself, to all that needs doing.

In my resurrection you have life and purpose, and by the gift of the Holy Spirit I equip you for the life of struggle and suffering, of joy and fulfilment, of pleasures and pains that are the cost of following Jesus. I will never leave you, never fail or forsake you. Nothing can tear you from my hands, not even you.

And in every generation parts of the message are new. I believe that we are in a time when for the first time in human history, through our conflicts, rivalries and selfishness, we have the capacity utterly to destroy the world: but we lack the capacity to stop ourselves or others doing so. For us the message is that of reconciliation, the transformation of destructive conflict and competition into a challenge in doing good, to build and not tear down, of revolutions of love and hope.

Our societies are those of dog eat dog and devil take the hindmost, of a world of ruthless seeking of our own good, of economies that enrich the few and impoverish the many, of power that is concentrated, of cynicism that is a thin layer of paint over the grey reality of despair.

We destroy the natural world and its diversity. We keep out those struggling and drowning in the seas of change and climate destruction. We are fighting wars with ever cleverer and more merciless weaponry. We hate as we always have done, but we kill and destroy with industrialised and soon artificial intelligence enhanced efficiency.

And over that dark landscape a light is cast by God who reaches out to those who believe, those who doubt and even to those who are convinced it's all is a load of nonsense. The light is cast by a cross, a throne on which God is exalted and dies, where his crown is a crown of thorns and his regalia are the wounds in his body. God so loved the world, as it says in John Chapter 3 verse 15, that he gave his only son that all

who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Life is what is offered by reconciliation. Life is something that this generations alive today but particularly those coming to adulthood in their 20's and 30's must grasp and share – life grasped from God's open hands, reconciliation spread across the world so that enemies become at worst merely competitors. War is replaced with the tedious beauty of negotiations and settlements and sorrow and reparations, and the Great War against our planet becomes the campaign to heal it and offer life to future generations as yet unborn.

The generation growing up now is not a snowflake generation - as some of the press would portray it - what a myth, what a lie! But it is a generation which seeks something new. Not all of them, of course, but so many that do not want to be manipulated, goaded and taken for granted, but want to choose life full of colour and hope and will brave so much to see that change come about. Research shows that the generation known as 'Gen Z' places a high value on diversity and prioritise social activism, with 70% involved in a social or political cause.

Ceylon Andi Hickman, working at Football beyond Borders; clever, imaginative, open minded. I knew her from a different campaign that I worked, I think she said yes without realising what she had signed up for. I drew her into the co-ordinating group for the Coronation service in the Abbey. She brought an invaluable perspective of young people, saw what could be done, and made it happen. She was the person that had those ideas.

Debra who will quiz me later; intelligent, insightful and passionate and effective. Teenagers in Salisbury Diocese in a church a few weeks back, over 300 of them, who pushed me with hard questions but responded to the challenge to open their lives to Christ, not for comfort but for hope, purpose, to face what life could be, who heard themselves being told when asking me an ethical question, “don't just listen to me, make up your own mind” - and were up for that.

One of our daughters, with learning difficulties, who overcame her fears to speak on a BBC podcast about invisible disabilities and the challenges they pose. The young people I saw in Salisbury Diocese training at army camps, young recruits, who will lay their lives on the line for this country if needed.

Across so many backgrounds, abilities and life experience – I don't see snowflakes. I see inspiration, encouragement, courage and determination.

One thing which particularly stands out is the deep commitment of Gen Z to important values – values of tolerance, justice and equity. But we know that young people are navigating a world which is complex, divided and hurting. Many of you see this in your day-to-day work and know it much better than I do.

It is a scandalous reality that all too many younger people witness or experience violence and lack alternative models for dealing with conflict, like that seven year old. Conflict can be as simple as being cancelled, to extreme domestic, civil or international violence.

I think of a Ukrainian family who lost their mother and came to visit Lambeth Palace, three children. One very young girl, the mum had died in an air raid, in shelling. In Lambeth Palace garden there's a statue of a young woman holding a baby, and when this young girl saw that she went and hugged that statue, and hugged that statue – and needed to be taken away from it in the end.

Across the world, more than 600 million young people, like that young girl or that lad, living in fragile and conflict-affected contexts and it is estimated that one in four young people alive today are affected by violence or armed conflict. Research by the UN has highlighted how violent conflict 'distorts the life cycle progress' of young people, sometimes forcing them to take on adult roles prematurely or closing off opportunities for education and employment.

While we pray that future generations will inherit something better, this is reality is for those coming into adulthood today. We need to equip and empower them to know how to deal with complexity, build relationships and cross divides - with confidence and perseverance. We need to resource them as peacemakers.

If we are to face the challenge of our times, we all need to learn how to be people of reconciliation. We need to become those who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, bring courage, creativity and hope to those around us by stepping into the broken places and drawing people into healing.

We need to do that so that the church around the world, 2 billion people, a quarter of the world's population, stands for light and hope, not power manipulation and darkness as it so often has in the past, and today.

This work of resourcing young people as peacemakers is vital for their own flourishing, but I say to all those who are Christians or some with funny collars on who are employed by churches or the Church of England, it's imperative for our mission.

At the heart of the Church of England's vision and strategy for the coming years is the goal of becoming a younger and more diverse church, doubling the number of children and young active disciples by 2030.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he writes this:

'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.'

In the words of my friend, Revd Dr Sam Wells, 'reconciliation is the gospel'.

And Ray Minniecon, known as 'Uncle Ray', which in conventions of indigenous peoples of Australia is a sign of immense respect (he's a pastor and hugely experienced peacemaker in Australia), puts it like this:

'[Jesus] walked with all of this hurt and pain, even he had wounds so deep. It's God himself, in the middle of all of this mess - these powers that be - putting out his hand both to the wounded as well as, as well as to those who have made the wounds: the oppressor as well as the oppressed. And saying, "Come on. Let's get back together again. Let's heal these relationships again. Let's make us be one as God created us to be".

God, in Christ, takes the initiative to be present in a hurting world and reconcile all things to himself. He invites us to accept this gift of reconciliation and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to join in with what He is doing to bring the restoration and renewal of all things.

As I said, this is different in every generation: are we listening to what peace and justice look like for Gen Z, how to get there? To share the good news of Jesus Christ must be to make known this invitation and to show its impact. Not by our power, but by our humility, our vulnerability and our willingness to listen, and also by equipping people with the practical tools to live out their response. Not just people in the church, but people everywhere, as a gift, as the grace that says to people everywhere – it is possible to disagree well.

Many of the imperatives of this generation are of peace and justice - from how to deal with the ups and downs of friendship and family, to how to take meaningful action on the gross injustices of society.

These are the imperatives of reconciliation, and they are at the heart of who God is. We see that in the Bible, through the Old Testament laws which tells us how we treat each other, through to dynamics in Jesus' parables and his teachings urging justice for who live in poverty. When we equip our young people as peacemakers and reconcilers, we join the dots between theory and practice. We stop preaching and start acting. We make clear the vitality of the gospel.

Other questions that young people are asking go even deeper. The three of the most important questions we all ask on some level as we move from childhood to adulthood are:

Who am I?

Where do I fit?

What difference can I make?

Jesus said this 'Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God'. Making peace speaks to our identity made as people each of us of supreme dignity, made in the image of God the Reconciler, the model of peace. It answers how our lives can have a positive impact, how much we're part of the story of the world in which God is at work.

When we resource people well, when we treat them with respect and dignity and listen to their challenges, we give them the tools to translate their desire for positive change into dramatic action. And more than that, and we enable us and them to become what St Paul describes as 'co-

workers' with Christ.

So first of all, the church can be made to look like what God made it to be. Second so the world can flourish.

In the world today, there are 1.2 billion young people aged 15 to 24 years, making up 16 percent, those 9 years, of the population. By 2030, it is expected that this number will have grown by 7% to nearly 1.3 billion. International research makes it abundantly clear that, that unless we empower and resource younger generations for the work of peace, conflicts remain entrenched, and peace proves unsustainable.

There is no peace without the involvement of young people, not least they are the soldiers – and also there's no peace without the involvement of women, but that's a different lecture.

The late former Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, said:

'Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies.'

Studies highlight the persistence of negative stereotypes of young people as either the disillusioned perpetrators or the disempowered victims of violence. When it comes to building peace, the perceived but not real inexperience of young people often leads them to be overlooked.

But work by the UN and other organisations is highlighting the power of young people as the agents of peace, as those with the power to shape their context and change the narratives of endless conflict. To break the generational cycle of violence decisively once and for all so that it loses its power.

Next week hopefully I'll be in Geneva for one day, meeting with pairs of Christians and Muslims from across the Middle East, who've been trained together and now making an effective difference in the areas they are working, they are working with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University.

This power of young people to be agents of peace is something I saw for myself on a visit to Cabo Delgado, Mozambique last year. There's a violent insurgency there, ISIS-led, which has claimed around four thousand lives and displaced one million people from their homes.

Reconciliation is a long way off - but a network of 'Peace Clubs' has been established, made up from gatherings of local faith and traditional leaders in the main towns and villages. These groups commit themselves to sharing information and engaging others, so that the fabric of society is woven back together. They do this by engaging in multiple actors at the same time simultaneously - young people. Women, major international companies, and the Government.

The work of these Peace Clubs is hugely creative and varied, one of the greatest things they use to do what they do is football. Football beyond borders. This is something that needs to go right round the world. Football matches to youth choirs called 'Voices of Peace'.

The Peace Clubs recognise that reconciliation will not be simple, nor quick. If you know someone from the other side, and that side caused the murder of your father or your brother or your sister or other members of your family, you don't forget it in 3 months. You don't forget it in 25 years. But you can begin to change.

You have heard earlier today that one of the habits that is part of the Difference course is 'reimagining'. These Peace Clubs enable young people to reimagine an alternative to conflict. They show that a different reality.

How can we resource young people as peacemakers? Firstly, we need to help young people develop habits of peace. As human beings, we like simple solutions. We like failsafe processes that give us results. But we all know that people – and peace – are so much more complicated than that. How many of us already agree with what we ourselves do individually, let alone what other people do?

Peacemakers Emmanuel Katangole and Chris Rice put this so well that it's worth quoting them in full – they wrote this:

'Reconciliation is about learning to live by a new imagination. God desires to shape lives and communities that reflect the story of God's new creation, offering concrete examples of another way and practices that engage the everyday challenges of peaceful existence in the world. That is why the work of reconciliation is sustained more through storytelling and apprenticeship than by training in techniques and how-tos. Through friendship with God, the stories of Scripture and faithful lives, and learning the virtues and daily practices those stories communicate, reconciliation becomes an ordinary, everyday pattern of life for Christians.'

This is why the Difference course has at its core three reconciling habits: be curious, be present, and reimagine. No 'one-size-fits-all'. It is critical that young people are formed as peacemakers so as they learn to embody peace they'll be able to adapt to the different context in which they find themselves. To improvise new solutions and bounce back from disappointments when things go wrong.

And the Difference course is about saying – what a gift we're all different, not what a problem we are all different. And its collective not just individual. We are who we are in relationship. Reconciliation is not the choice of a lone individual. It needs the resilience and persistence that comes with community.

In the work I do and particularly quite recently, some stuff I've been doing on immigration without going into the party politics of it, I've been quite unpopular with a lot of people, with some quite unpleasant things said, and hostile things said. I can get really irate about that. Reconciliation is not done by saintly individuals, at least not in my experience but then I'm not one. Its done by a group of people some of whom can simmer down

the ones boiling over, and other who can warm up the others who've gone cold.

The power of belonging is huge. We know this all over London, all over this country, in issues of gun crime and knife crimes, the perpetrators of such violence exploit the desire of people to belong, particularly young people. The work of peacemaking offers a sense of belonging that is just as compelling, I would say 100 times more compelling, because it offers young people an attractive alternative to conflict with, they are a part of and valued.

And that is something spectacular, that's not a small thing, when we were there in November, a young women came in who'd walked for two weeks after her village had been raided by a small group of ISIS, she'd watched her husband beheaded, and she's watched as they took her young baby by the feet and swung it head against the wall. You can't imagine the level of trauma and Caroline and I knelt at her feet and listened as she told this story and wept with her.

But peacemaking is more powerful even than that. It's not that it just stops that, those that are involved in it know that they are called to, which world changing, world transforming, world making, and world we want to belong to. It can happen in schools, churches, youth groups. When we have the new Difference course materials in a short while for those contexts, my prayer is that it will transform the work so that they learn how to deal with conflict and then they use that learning to deal with conflict all around the world. The overflows.

And lastly, we need to model good leadership – and equip young people to be reconciling leaders. Part of the resourcing for young people for peace is to share a paradigm of leadership, in which leaders bring out the best in others without seeking to dominate them.

We don't want lone heroes. We want people who know they are weak and fragile, and therefore work with others to fulfil the vision they've been given and hold themselves accountable to others.

As said next week I will be in Geneva, and I have been particularly inspired by the work we've been doing with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar , on the Emerging Peacemakers Forum. It gathers young people from different beliefs and backgrounds to facilitate dialogue and build peace and task them with developing projects designed to cross societies' most challenging divides. The latest cohort is gathering as we sit here.

And finally, if we are to resource young people as peacemakers, we need the humility to ask for their input, direction and help. We couldn't have done the work that we did on the Coronation and the involvement of over 400 young people in the church next to the Abbey. We couldn't have done it without Ceylon there, very politely and graciously, moderately politely, well, graciously, making suggestions about why some of our ideas wouldn't quite work and what could. She was invaluable and inspiring.

Young people are not part of the church, they are already a vital part of the church today, of the present. I keep my notes from the last reverse



mentoring meeting with Deborah. Her suggestions on attitude and leadership have made a huge difference to my transparency and willingness to listen and awareness of power. Not all my colleagues would agree with that, but when I tell them to agree, they all say yes.

Being honest about our own ignorance, inviting young people to educate us and to challenge us, can be more meaningful than any abstract lesson on what it takes to build peace.

It's not easy to build peace. The image of the peacemaker is of Jesus, on a cross - that's what peacemaking is. Arms stretched out on either side.

Building bridges, being a bridge between people and if, like a friend of mine says - 'if you become a bridge people walk all over you'.

We only see healing by resourcing young people with the source of peace. But they give us so many reasons to be hopeful. They extend the motion of the church they pave the way between communities and nations, they break the cycles of violence of generations.

By building up new generations in peacemaking, its supportive communities and opportunities to lead, we really can see them being part of what God is doing in this world to make all things new.

Read the full press release [here](#).

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