

Transcript of Archbishop's presidential address as delivered at General Synod in London today:

Twenty-twenty, both for the Church of England and the global Anglican Communion, is a significant year. In 2020, in the Church of England, we will publish in the next few months, before the July Synod, Living in Love and Faith, and we will move forward to a Church wide engagement and participation, from every part of the Church, of all views, inclusively – also setting up a working group to pursue this work to its conclusion.

In 2020, we will play our part in COP26 in Glasgow. In 2020 we will say farewell to the Archbishop of York and welcome his successor. In 2020, as the Church of England, we will set our direction for the next Quinquennium, both in the elections for General Synod and in establishing new vision and goals, based I hope around the Five Marks of Mission. In 2020, at the end of July and into early August, we look ahead to the Lambeth Conference, where we will be welcoming Bishops from all over the world to consider prayerfully the direction and mission of the Anglican Communion.

To date out of 985 bishops about 660, just under, have registered for the conference. Three provinces have said they're not coming and the other 37 are sending people.

The theme of the Conference is 'God's Church for God's World', with a sub-title of 'Listening, Walking and Witnessing Together'. The theme reflects a simple theological reality, that God has established the Church for worship and witness, to be Jesus in the world, to declare the wonderful works of Him who drew us out of darkness into his marvellous light. The text, as that last sentence hints, of the Lambeth Conference will be 1 Peter. Its themes of love, suffering, resilience, holiness, witness and how to live in a hostile environment so that Christ is truly Lord, are key themes today for most of the Anglican Communion.

In Chapter 5, Peter draws on the ancient image of the Good Shepherd and speaks to the leaders of the churches, saying he is a fellow shepherd to them. A key moment in what he writes is the warning that they are to be alert and watchful, for their enemy the devil prowls like a roaring lion, seeing who may be devoured.

In this Synod we often talk about elephants in the room, but Peter talks about lions. I may revert to elephants later.

Three weeks ago I was in Kenya. I was listening to Archbishop Jackson Olit Sapit, a Maasai by origin, who grew up in a small village and by some missionaries received his education after his father died at the age of three.

Archbishop Jackson told us a story of when he was a young man, 13 or 14 years old, and a herder. And on his first duty guarding the flocks and herds at night, his friends had told him that when a lion roared, it was preparing to charge, and that he had spent the night terrified. The joke by his friends is, of course, that lions are far more dangerous when they're silent, because this means they are stalking their prey and preparing to pounce. They roar when wandering around looking for the prey they will then stalk. His friends told him that in the morning.

Shepherds, in other words, says Peter, need to have their wits about them, because to protect their sheep they need to know what might threaten them – the lions that pose a danger to the flock. The Lion of 1 Peter 5 is a warning to the churches – all of them together – ~~not merely~~ to

individuals as we so often interpret it.

We can so easily turn or perceive other people or ideas into lions and consider them a threat, even an enemy. We can make a lion out of shadows, or we can be assailed the lion which has snuck up on us quietly. We as a church, as this Synod, need to be aware and yet not so cautious that we are paralysed with fear and communicate that fear to one another around.

The lion of our time has many faces, some of them modern, many of them as old as the church itself. Notice that in 1 Peter 5 it is described as 'your enemy, the devil'. Not your enemy, those who disagree with you. Not your enemy, those who troll you on Twitter. Not your enemy, those who say nasty things in Synod – which would never happen. Not your enemy because they are of a different church or form of churchmanship. It's your enemy, the devil. It echoes Paul in Ephesians saying, we do not fight against flesh and blood – our enemy is the principles and powers in the heavenly places, says Paul.

The lion, as I say, has many faces, but they are not the faces that we see around us. They are not human enemies. Some of them have been around forever. Culture, cruelty, lack of love are pre-eminent, and we can aid the biting of the lion through social media in a way we've never known before.

The Lambeth Conference will be an opportunity for the bishops, as shepherds, to reflect on the world we Christians find ourselves in as 'resident aliens', the term Peter uses in 1 Peter 1, aliens and strangers, and how we have to learn to live as aliens and strangers, that faces up to the reality of that status boldly. Perhaps the events of the last three and a half years have taught us something about being aliens and strangers. Something where we see those we know and love becoming aliens and strangers, or feeling they are.

We have to learn, at the Lambeth Conference, about what it is to live alongside our brothers and sisters, not just as hosts in a sort of patronising "how nice that you've come to see us" way. Nor just as 'British Anglicans' as though that was the foundation of everything. But as fellow foreigners, resident aliens in the world, citizens of heaven and yet residing on this Earth.

We will, at the Lambeth Conference, and we should as the Church here, as shepherds gathered together from around the world, recognise and name the face of the lion in each place.

Within the Church that face may be fear of sharing the Gospel, of witnessing, or of worshipping. It may be climate change, gender justice, poverty, modern slavery, peace and reconciliation. How we encounter those who are LGBTIQ+. Underlying all those are issues of identity, and they underline many others, and what it means to be a human for whom Christ is Lord; what it is to be human in relation to other humans, but where, for us, Christ is Lord.

Then there are other are animals, shadowy ones in the dark, whose noise we hear, and we're beginning to distinguish their shapes but we don't yet identify them. We can't just assume them to be the face of the lion.

Scientific change, biotechnology, information technology, artificial intelligence, machine learning with biotechnology, the ability to shape the human being so that they come out the way we want them to – what a government can do with that in the future. What we can do to one

another. Go back to those different questions of identity. Do we say that we will reshape human beings so there's no one with a disability. What does that say about the humanity of those who have different abilities.

Some of these forms of learning may yet be aids to the shepherd. They may be useful elephants if rightly used. But they may be the lion which transforms our world into greater injustice and inequality. These themes will run throughout the conference. The science – not to be frightened of, not to run away from, but to engage with, be informed about, to learn from.

We will seek to renew our discipleship and commitment to witness and evangelism in a way proper to each context. A disciplined and alert discipleship must not be ashamed of the good news of Jesus, and it must see that it is foundational to the beautiful vision of the living stones of the Church in 1 Peter. Every stone – whatever its nature, its ethnicity, its abilities, its sexuality – is a living stone.

And as we share in fellowship here, and at the Conference with our fellow Anglicans, with whom we may at times disagree profoundly... who in past years, in some cases, have been described, and I'm talking here about Anglicans in sub-Saharan Africa, as "one generation away from barbarism". That was said about 15 years ago. As we disagree profoundly with one another, we must remember two things that counter the asininity and the sin of that kind of statement; the inward-looking-ness.

First, that we love one another and are bound together by Christ's sacrifice and our mutual recognition of the face and work of God in one another. Second, we cannot change the culture, or even the minds, of other people anywhere near as easily as we can change ourselves. Shepherds who spend all their time arguing how best to protect the sheep – or indeed, what a sheep is – may look up to find the flock has been eaten (not hearing or being aware of the lion that was stalking).

If we are going to expect much of the shepherds, lay and ordained, we must express our love towards them. Love is seen in 1 Peter as assuring hope and resilience and is expressed in integrity and with forgiveness and mercy.

I have to say I'm not sure that in our social media age that forgiveness is a word that features often in messages of a hundred or two-hundred and forty characters.

The Ordinal is worth going back to. I speak as one who never really read it properly until I had to use it. The Ordinal sets out what the practicalities of love involve. The Ordinal sets out what love looks like, as a shepherd, to deacons, priests and bishops.

To be a church that expresses love institutionally, we have to consider the well-being of all. Today, with the pressures to spot the lion, to listen to the lion, to see the danger, as we well know, there is a great the burden on clergy and bishops, as well as laity.

I want to think especially for a moment about our clergy, particularly in the context of the Clergy Wellbeing Covenant which we will be discussing later in these sessions.

The Very Revd Dr Francis Bridger, in his theological reflection on the Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy, reminded us that the notion of profession is deeply rooted in religious values – to profess, to vow.

'By means of a theology of vocation,' Bridger says, 'it becomes possible to reinvest the idea of professionalism with a transcendent moral dimension'. It means that the professional is aligned, lay and ordained, with the vocational as a response to God's love. When the clergy are supported, nourished and able to flourish, the whole church can flourish.

With my doubtless well-deserved reputation for managerialism I hesitate to mention the rather dull, bureaucratic sounding context of professional standards. I love that phrase, professional standards! I say it last thing at night to myself to keep myself content, like a mantra really. [laughter]

Yet professional standards should be love in action. Professional standards, again whether they are for lay or clergy, call us to love and serve one another so as to liberate to each other the gifts that each has received. Jesus was showing professional standards when he washed his disciples' feet.

For the Church to live as the people of God, we must also be shepherds to each other.

Recognising that we have both a duty of care and a duty of responsibility and setting that within a framework that supports and upholds the clergy is part of responding to the modern world and living out our lives in service to Christ. Our present forms of pastoral care are neither pastoral nor caring.

The recent Sheldon Hub report on the CDM made that amply clear. It does not help reconciliation, it is weaponised, it is stressful for complainant and the person complained about. It does not aid safeguarding. In changing the way we do things like clergy discipline, clergy must feel as though they are treated fairly, complainants must feel that they are heard, and all need to be provided with the resources and support they need whilst also holding accountable those who fall short in their duties of care.

In establishing the Covenant for Clergy Wellbeing, we emphasise that a covenant is more than a contract with one another – it is a promise, based in grace and gratitude. It is about going beyond the minimum, in good faith, acting out of love rather than legalistic obligation. It's a mirror of Christ's pouring out of his own blood to build a new covenant with God's people. We must be willing, as Jesus did, to do the unthinkable out of our love for one another. We still set boundaries. We are loved children of God, who signal the arrival of God's people by the way we live and the standards we uphold for ourselves.

The Covenant is one aspect of seeing the culture of the Church. The job of the clergy is, by its very nature, an impossible one. So also is the call of laity, and indeed of every single Christian of any age and time. It can only be lived in the grace of God. Our baptismal Covenant sets out for us our ordination as laity.

I know all too well that that Covenant is one that we cannot carry out on our own. It is easy to wake up weary, when the work of a broken world seems so great and God's kingdom seems so far, and feel sometimes like this is just burden. When you are on the front lines, as many of you are, of hurt and loss, doubt and pain, confusion and sorrow, being pulled thanklessly in every direction – it is so easy to feel disheartened.

However, something about being a Christian is about changing that attitude. We say: 'we are not going to let this be done to us. We are not going

to let the darkness overwhelm us. We are going to take hold of the Gospel of Christ together and use it to make His light known to the whole world.' Together. Not biting and snapping at one another.

If we all, lay and ordained, look at ministry as a gift that God has given us to make his word known to everyone, perhaps on those dark mornings we can unwrap a little more of His limitless gift and in so doing discover new depths of God's unconditional love for us. Perhaps then we can find the strength to be more united, more alert to the lion roaring, and less inwardly focused.

As a church, Anglicans - all Anglicans but particularly the Church of England - always have been and always will be prone to shoot ourselves in the foot, quite often while the foot is firmly in the mouth. When that happens – and one might say, in fact we have said perhaps in more eloquent terms that it has happened recently, we can turn towards the Christ who promises: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest'.

When we keep Jesus Christ at the centre of our lives, we can find our brokenness and our uncertainty is tended to, that there is a balm, and that we are cared for – perhaps not when we would like or how we would like, but we trust that Christ will provide us with His perfect peace, in His own way and his perfect timing. We remember 1 Peter's advice to the shepherds, to 'cast all your anxiety' on God, who will always be big enough to handle it. So much of the anxiety which leads to our arguments, divisions and party politics in the Church comes from anxiety and fear. They in their turn come from not casting our anxieties on Christ.

And here is a secret that we all know and keep from ourselves and from each other – we do not have to be perfect all the time. We minister and witness through our broken humanity, despite ourselves, because then we point to the perfect wholeness of Christ. So much of reaching our potential, of flourishing, is knowing that we are supported, that we have others who understand and care, who will encourage us when we are low and remind us of God's promise when we have forgotten. The whole context of 1 Peter is about the body of Christ, the temple in which each stone is fitting together and supports the other.

We have hope that through us God will make huge changes in our society and in our world – hope in the Christian sense of a certain expectation – because we see in the gospel the small changes made to people's lives every day. We have hope that we the church can grow because we see people transformed by the power of God who loves us. And so, we have confidence. Not necessarily in the Church of England, but in the word of the Gospel and the faithfulness of God.

I know all too well that it feels sometimes as though the task is daunting and the lion will be overwhelming. I know that many of us hold hopes and dreams for the church in our hearts that we hardly dare hope might be realised. And I also know very well that all of these hopes might not be the same for all of us, but I believe that we have at least one prayer in common: that God makes us instruments of His peace, comforts those of us who are hurting and encourages those of us who are searching in this year and beyond.

Each of us has a role to play in this, the wonderful work of building God's kingdom. We step together into God's extraordinary project, which is not and never could be about our own work, but only about the glorious generosity and power of God. We can pray for each other, even – and perhaps especially – those with whom we disagree. We can love one another with the love that 'covers a multitude of sins'. Of course, there will

be days where there are burdens, we all need to go on being alert for the lion, but I want us all to think about the joys and blessings as well. If we cannot genuinely enjoy the reality of the gift we've been given, then, well, why are we here.

This year and the years to come are years to achieve change, to make progress in the mission of God – to be a light to the world. This is a God-given chance for us to work together with God as God breaks into our world and makes himself ever more known to us. So let us continue to recognise that in this Synod we see not just each other, but we see the hand of Christ proffered to us. Let us join hands with our fellow Christians and together in our brokenness and our faith, walk with God towards a world where justice and righteousness reign, and the love and peace of Jesus are found in everyone.

Amen.

15 min read

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