



Text of the Archbishop's speech delivered:

In around 1905 the Orthodox Churches began to consider that, since it was well over 1,000 years since their previous Synod, it was about time for another one. They began preparatory work in earnest in around 1965 and so last June, for two weeks in Crete, the Great and Holy Synod was held. Although some people did not attend, it was generally considered a success, and the conclusions it reached are now being widely studied.

I wanted to begin there to put some perspective on our practice as Synod. I am not, to be clear suggesting we move to a once in a millennium regularity of meetings, neither am I raising any question as to how often we do meet. By most standards of churches including other Anglican ones we meet very frequently. This is especially true for churches where there is a historical and personal episcopacy, rather than episcopacy found in a conference or gathering. That is a consequence of our history and of our delegated power to make national law in England.

We live and think synodically, in terms of parties, procedures and attitudes. We work on winning votes which means we develop well organised parties which meet and co-ordinate speeches and responses even to quite routine bits of legislation. We may not be at the stage of the House of Commons, with three line whips, but we have some resemblance to the Lords, with party groups and a mass of cross bench members whose vote is far less predictable.

People become experts in the ways and procedures of the Synod. When looking at proposals all of us think about what the response of the General Synod will be, how to get things through, or block them. That is both normal and proper.

Yet, because we are followers of Christ, participating in this Synod in His name, we need to remember the dangers and temptations. We turn then to look at Luke 4:1-12.

In all three temptations Barth sees Satan encouraging Jesus to "take from now on a direction which will not need to have the cross as its end and goal."

We cannot ever forget that as Christians we are a cross shaped people.

We are to follow the one who was crucified, expecting the same or worse treatment at the hands of the world. That is the promise and warning of Jesus to his followers.

We are to carry the cross as we follow. We are to be publicly, openly and convincingly those who are Christians.

We are to abandon all other forms or hopes of salvation, of safety and hope, than those which come from belonging to the fellowship of the cross. We are only to rely on God, Barth comments again that we are: "to live only by this word and promise of God".

The temptations (which of course are mentioned in all three synoptic gospels, and arguably in different forms in John) have been commented on and applied millions of times, and there are many ways of seeing them as they apply to us. I want to pick three things which seem relevant to a Synod at such a time as this.

First a word about 'at such a time as this'. The word 'uncertainty' to apply to where we are is surely one of the more overused words of the era, and I have, to be honest, contributed to its overuse, especially in my Christmas sermon, deeply unpopular with some. Perhaps a better way of expressing things is that we are in a time when the future offers a wider range of opportunity, or of threat, than we have been used to, culturally, politically and economically.

There are a thousand ways to explain the Brexit vote, or the election of President Trump, or the strength in the polls in Holland of Geert Willders or in France of Madame Le Pen and many, other leaders in a nationalist, populist, or even fascist tradition of politics. Almost certainly there is no simple explanation, almost certainly the impact of globalisation economically, or marginalisation politically and of post modernity culturally have some role to some extent. That will be the material of a thousand PhDs and no consensus in the next 50 years. We are in the middle of it all, and we see neither the destination nor the road.

Whether one was a supporter of Brexit or of remain, there is now a wide and liberal choice of future for this country. In a recent meeting with some economists we reviewed the very serious and ultimately unsustainable balance of payments deficit, the appallingly low levels of investment by the corporate sector, the near absence of research and development funding, the dreadful levels of educational aspiration amongst those who have the least opportunities, the growing demands of care for an older population to a degree that will put massive strain on government funding, the skills gap, the lack of progress towards our goals of a carbon neutral economy, and so on and so on. I really do not wish to sound like Cassandra, who was never believed, but it did not seem entirely and unreservedly optimistic.

Yet at the end of an afternoon of bludgeoning ourselves with figures, not even having reached the end of it, the economists and social scientists and (I am so sorry but I must use the word) experts (you may hiss if you like) agreed on one thing: at the heart of all the issues is one of culture

and of values.

This is a moment to reimagine Britain, a moment of potential opportunity, certainly combined with immensely hard work and heavy lifting. It is a moment of challenge, but challenge that as a nation can be overcome with the right practices, values, culture and spirit. This could be a time of liberation, of seizing and defining the future, or it could be one in which the present problems seize our national future and define us.

Which is where we come in. Let's not be too self-important. I don't mean we, the Church of England, are the answer. But we can be part of the answer, we have a voice and a contribution and a capacity and a reach and above all a Lord who is faithful when we fail and faithful when we flourish.

We educate a million children. We are in every community. We are embedded in the national history. We can work in partnerships, ecumenically, interfaith and across society, partnerships that have grown stronger in this century. When we consider that the Office of National Statistics ranks White British on free school meals as third lowest of 18 ethnic categories for educational achievement at GCSE, that educational provision beyond 16 is struggling, and that we are a major provider of education our first question must be addressed to ourselves.

We have the skills, the strength, the heritage, most of all the Christ sent vocation, what are we going to do as Britain is reimagined? How are we going to contribute to the national future?

There is before the churches of this land, over the next many years, an extraordinary opportunity to be part of reimagining a new Britain, its practices, values, aspirations and global role. To do so we must ourselves be cross shaped, Jesus following, confident in faith and humble in service, above all outward looking.

Our temptations are those that will make such a national role which we can have in partnership with many others, impossible.

The only witness for the temptations was Jesus himself. He must have known his disciples would have similar times of trial – so he shares this story with them that they might know his presence with them in the midst of it being hard, his example and his leading.

There is first the temptation to self-indulgence, to satisfying our needs within the Church first and foremost. "He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of

bread.” Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’ ”

One aspect of this temptation is to meet his own needs, to indulge an appetite that is both urgent and reasonable. To do so is to avoid the way of the Cross. Jesus came for a purpose, and that purpose take him through the cross to the resurrection and the ascension and the sending of the Spirit and eventual return. All of that would be shipwrecked by self-indulgence, by using his power for himself rather than continuing in the full and limited humanity of hunger and frailty at the end of a great fast.

Wanting to win votes is normal, wanting our point of view to prevail now is reasonable, yet our vocation as God's people is to subordinate our interests to God's call to be Christ in the world in which we live. That is costly. It requires restraint, sense and care for the most vulnerable.

There are no structures that guarantee safety, or feeling safe, only right attitudes do. The text received by Simon Butler was an inexcusable self-indulgence by the sender; a perfect illustration of how not to act. He rightly said that it or all actions like it eliminate any sense of safety, and, as Jayne Ozanne says, any sense of trust.

The recent revelations about abuse is another example, about which I cannot directly comment, because they are the subject of a police investigation. But on the principle let me be blunt and clear. Abuse has occurred across every tradition of the church, and in every other institution, and in society as a whole, and above all in families. It is part of the human tragedy, and something against which we must struggle. That struggle has to show genuine concern for survivors. They are people to be loved, as much as we are able, as one, united church.

We resist this first temptation to self-indulgence through simplicity and the open and genuine expression of love in action. We pray together, read scripture together, live as God's family in the world. We are to be truly synodical, on the way together, the literal meaning of the word synod. It is a way of the cross, as we will be reminded on Wednesday, and involves listening, travelling, loving, changing. It is a hard lesson, often failed.

The second temptation includes a desire for power and glory, for relevance through demonstrating that our way is effective. “Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”

Jesus answered him, “It is written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,

and serve only him.’ ”

This temptation is one into which the church historically has fallen continually and still does, whenever the post-Constantinian tendency to exercise power overtakes us. The Church of England retains influence. We have at present the extraordinary privilege of sitting in parliament, the remarkable gift and responsibility of educating, chaplains in every sphere of life, and a role in public life of the nation. We have a heritage of presence across England, burdensome although it may sometimes be, and the vocation of being the default point of help and support in times of trouble, or celebration in times of joy.

It may not be what it was, although Golden Age nostalgia syndrome is a deeply unreliable guide to history, but it remains a gift and heritage beyond value, offering opportunities for service and love beyond all our deserving.

It is a heritage to be used confidently, but not arrogantly. We are not to seek to rule, but to love and serve, to validate what God alone has given us, by grace and not by our deserving, through our commitment to be with the people of England in all circumstances, regardless of whether they agree with us or not. We wash all feet indiscriminately, and thus must affect our language, our attitudes and a profound desire to do good rather than to be given influence and power.

In the necessary reimagination of our country we cannot dictate but we must participate. Participation means being a listening, suffering and reconciling presence, not a hectoring, self-interested one. The language of public life at present is deeply, savagely divided and may become worse. Our power is found only in selfless service and the cross.

Lastly, one aspect of the third temptation in Luke's account is to seek impact and effect through drama and crisis, to tempt God to make it clear we belong to God. "Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him,

“If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here,

for it is written,

‘He will command his angels concerning you,

to protect you,’

and

‘On their hands they will bear you up,

so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’

It is the temptation to shortcuts and easy solutions, to grand gestures which are no solutions because they avoid the Cross. It says to us that "if only we do x or y, then the church will flourish and grow". Unless x and y include discipleship and prayer, then the answer is wrong, for prayer takes us to the feet of the crucified, risen and glorified saviour.

The tapestry at the east end of Coventry Cathedral is one from which I have drawn huge inspiration and comfort, but I only want to take one aspect here. Sitting in my Canon's stall on the eve of another overseas journey, often likely to be complicated, I would look at the tapestry during Evensong.

Between the feet of Christ in glory is a human figure. The person is safe, secure, protected, looking outward into the world. Yet they cannot see Christ, only the wounds of his feet, and they are naked, exposed and unprotected except by the Christ they cannot see. It is in closeness to the crucified, in sharing in the burdens of that crucifixion by our own cross carrying, that we are truly secure in our future in this world at this time.

We are called to be the people of the cross, to live as those whose only hope is God, closely nestling in the presence of Christ, seeing and loving the world around as Christ does, so that in this time of a choice between national hope and opportunity or threat and fear we may play the part to which we are called in reimagining our country and seizing the best future that lies before us.

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