

Read the Archbishop's remarks that were delivered last night at the annual Lord Mayor's Banquet at London's Guildhall.

My Lord Mayor, My late Lord Mayor, My Lord Chancellor, Prime Minister, Lord Speaker, Your Excellencies, My Lords, Fellow Aldermen, Sheriffs, Chief Commoner, Ladies and Gentlemen...

In my office, there is a list of overused words and phrases that I try and stop my colleagues from using. One of them is the word 'unprecedented' – because, of course, there is almost nothing which is truly unprecedented.

Another overused word is the word 'crisis', which comes from the Greek 'krisis'. I'm brushing up on my Greek purely for the Prime Minister's benefit tonight.

'Krisis' means a time of decision. And in the New Testament, there are two concepts of time. There is chronos, which is daily time, such as now and how long this speech lasts, and Kairos, which is a moment of time where there is a choice, and you have no choice but to leave.

A 'Kairos moment' is another phrase I tend to ban, because in the Church we now use it to describe anything from the coffee rota to who manages the tombola at the village fete.

It is an overused cliché, and as such I never use it. Because I avoid clichés like the plague and – according to some people anyway – I only burn bridges when I get to them.

This is, however, a U-turn moment for me. Although in the Church, we don't say U-turn, we say 'repent' - which means to turn around and face God – it's basically the same thing, but with more forgiveness at the end. In the Church of England, we still do 'do God!' All of us sin – I once gave a speech in which I said, 'We're all sinners, I'm a sinner too', and a lady came up to me after, very cross, and said 'If I'd have known you were a sinner I wouldn't have come.' Yes, all of us sin, but it is never too late to turn around.

Because this is, my Lord Mayor, genuinely a Kairos moment. And because of what we have gone through in the last two years, an unprecedented Kairos moment.

Kairos moments are often seen as rather key moments of change where we are going to do something new, unexpected, unheard of. But, they are always uncomfortable and messy. The process of trying to find agreement is difficult. Sometimes we come away from a negotiation disappointed – yet knowing that much has been done. I would like to pay tribute to Alok Sharma, to the Prime Minister, to many of the other people at Glasgow – John Kerry would be another one – who through the most monumental hard work did get us to make a change in direction. We, our children and our grandchildren will owe them much.

The people involved in COP over the last few weeks and months know what it feels just to be disappointed at the last moment. Their job was remarkable. Their struggle must continue, and I have no doubt listening to the Prime Minister that all sides in politics are equally committed to that which he has rightly said is necessary to our existence in the next forty or fifty years.

It is so easy to paint a depressing picture of the state of the world and our nation. I'm sure, for many people in this room, there are problems that keep you awake at night.

People have often called into question the future of this country. And over the last five years we have gotten to a significant period where people are saying everything is going downhill. But, just as in the past I believe that not only do we have a future, but it's a future of enormous hope and potential.

It's not an automatic future though. We heard a vision of the future from the Prime Minister, from the Lord Mayor and Alderman's speech about the things that need to be done; but a future that is going to be filled with hope is based on the choices we make today. To double down on the clichés, adversity is not destiny – unless we choose it to be so.

Hope depends on three things. First is our people. In this Guildhall this evening, there are people who can make a difference. No, I am not talking about the great political leaders, although it is true of them. I am not talking about Archbishops wittering on in their declining years, but those representing the intermediate institutions between the state and the individual that lead the way for the individual choices which gather us together, companies, businesses, entrepreneurs, volunteers, churches. Far from declining, churches and volunteers are more active than ever, here and overseas, round the world in health, education, caring for those in need in all and every way.

It is not often recognised that during COVID there were 4.7 million new volunteers in this country, and 3.7 million are continuing to volunteer. That is an extraordinary tribute to the people of this country and is a foundation for hope.

Secondly, we need to find ways to renew our vision of what we can be, on the basis of a sustained narrative of what this country is. A narrative based not just on our material success – the extraordinary gifts of our Armed Forces, the intelligence we have in our universities and the other things that have been rightly mentioned this evening – but a narrative based on our moral character that has the courage to reject what does not serve the common good, even when it is to our advantage, and the courage to embrace short-term costs for long-term gain.

Thirdly, and I hope you are not surprised by this for I am not ashamed of it, is the faithfulness of God to those who seek Him. For most of the volunteers there is that sense of wanting to do the right thing in loving their neighbour, whatever faith background they come from.

With such foundations – people, vision, a moral vision and the foundation of God's faithfulness - we can be bold.

A bold Britain for the 21st Century will find ways of disagreeing well, for we will disagree, and thank goodness we do! That is what gives life to our society. At Lambeth Palace the team that works there on conflict management and mediation around the world have developed a course for disagreement, how we disagree, for the grassroots everywhere from villages in the Congo, to Hong Kong, to communities in this country. They spot three habits: to be present to those with whom you disagree, to be curious and to reimagine our histories of difference. This country must learn to disagree well, for a divided house cannot stand, to use the words of Jesus.

This bold Britain will be one that values our planet and those who live in it.

Our late Lord Mayor, you and Hillary have done the most extraordinary job in a situation you could never have imagined you would have to face.

But valuing our planet and living in it is something that not coincidentally the late Lord Mayor who has served two terms and the new Lord Mayor both put at the centre of what they are doing. And quite rightly, My Lord Mayor, you have said that businesses will play a key role in this vision. I know from my time in the oil industry that business and companies are not a homogenous boring grey blocks of amoral things.

They are made up of people, funny enough, and that is often forgotten. With families and futures to think of, people who are guided by moral frameworks for their life, who can make choices that lead us towards good or bad.

Companies and businesses can be powerful tools for social good when they have ethical systems built in which encourage people to do the right thing, when they value people centred profits and when they seek relationships of covenant, not just of contract.

A company which uplifts the vulnerable, which supports and empowers its people, a company which provides a good product or service and which offers opportunities and development for the young...there is no end to the good such a company can do in our society.

In business, such a company finds that the grace of God and the abundance of God in our creation takes away the idea of the zero-sum game: it is not a choice between 'you' or 'me', or between 'profits' and 'people', or between 'fairness' and 'gain'. There is the offer of abundance for all – and that's why I'm so delighted Lord Mayor, that you have decided for focus on the 'S' as well as the 'E' of ESG this year – presumably he has decided to leave the 'G' of Governing to the Prime Minister for now. (I too have one 'G' in my line of work.)

There are no magic wands. There is simply choice and hard work, and that is possible because the government frees people to make good choices rather than trying to control them. I truly believe that in this country we are up to the job, in this Kairos moment of making choices.

So, it is my honour to ask you to raise a glass tonight to a wonderful late Lord Mayor and to the Court of Aldermen.

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