



**Read the Archbishop of Canterbury's sermon at the Opening Service of the 18th meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council this afternoon at the Church of Christ, Legon, Accra.**

The service was attended by the President of the Republic of Ghana, His Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, and the First Lady, Her Rebecca Akufo-Addo, as well as the Primate and bishons of the Province of the Church of West Africa, the members of the Anglican Consultative



Pope Francis once started an address to the Curia – the most senior Cardinals – at the Vatican by saying, more or less, you are all theoretical believers and practical atheists. What he meant was that they did believe, but they kept belief in an active God locked away in one compartment of their lives, and when there were problems they went ahead and tried to sort it out without God.

It is a typical fault of clergy and a great temptation, Your Excellency, for politicians.

Technically its known as theism, which means that God sets creation off and then stands back and watches. God exists in this theory but is not involved in our lives or in the world or in creation day to day. When the church – as in the UK, is declining since 1851 (as a percentage of the population) we bring in new strategies (usually about once every ten years). That is, we seek to work things out for ourselves – and then at the end of it all we think, well, we better tell God what we've decided and see if he agrees, but we're going to do it anyway.

When we are analysing a problem, we forget God. I was in a meeting last week, the General Synod of the Church of England, and we have two periods of questions where questions are put to the senior Bishops and the administrators of the Church, and especially to the Archbishops. We had 240 questions and it lasted two and a half hours in total.

Someone stood up and asked me the question: if the present trend continues, is it not true that we will have no-one left by around 2060 in the Church of England? It will be a lot of big buildings, a lot of money but no people.

Knowing that this was a statistics question, I asked the Bishop of Manchester to answer it for me, because he is a professional statistician. So he said to the man who asked: your statistics are wrong and wrongly calculated, but I thought to myself that, much worse, was the questioner's assumption that God will not do anything in the Church of England – either in judgement of the church, for its faults and failings, or in bringing revival and reversing the trend.

But when I suggested to people around me that that was the right answer, several looked at me as though I was mad. One said: "But, we don't know that God will work, so how can we be sure that he will?"



But the Bible says something completely else. The Bible speaks of God who is infinitely greater than we can think or imagine, but who is revealed definitively by Jesus and who is involved in every aspect of life.

Meet Jesus and you meet God. Read about Jesus in the Gospel and you read about God. There is no other way of knowing God. It is Jesus or ignorance. Live as a Christian and you learn to see the Holy Spirit of God at work. Sometimes obviously, sometimes quietly. In all of the readings we had today we see that God enters into our world and engages with it at every level.

God is not distant or absent. He has not, as Psalm 44 suggests, taken a holiday or gone to sleep. God is the one whose love for His world is so overwhelming that it flows out into the heart of creation in Genesis, simply by Him saying so, and the Creator creates creation in a way that was simply for the joy of seeing the dancing of the stars and planets, of the beauty of the creation and of the company and love of human beings.

God creates all things as it said in Genesis and Colossians 1 and calls them good. He blesses the creatures of the earth and tells them to look after all the other things He makes and loves.





In Genesis, we see that the world and God cannot be separated. God is the one who creates, sustains and completes. The entire world is suffused with the God who created it.

The English writer GK Chesterton commented on one occasion the sun only rises every morning because God says, “Get up and do it again.”

And God charges us, human beings, you and me, to assist him in that task. To be involved with the world, to love it, to care for it, in the same way as God loves and cares for it. He creates order among human beings. He allows states to exist and rulers to be chosen to ensure that the good are rewarded and the evil are punished – one of the hardest tasks for those in authority over us.

This very obviously links with the Fifth Mark of Mission: to treasure the earth, to protect the natural environment that God has called good.

In Matthew’s Gospel, we see God’s involvement in all the smallest aspects of life; this is comforting. In the verses in the gospel reading we find that we do not have to do it all ourselves, that God cares and is present in every small detail.

It is said by Matthew that God can count the hairs of our heads – well that is easier for some of us than others! God is hope for those in need.

Jesus, when he spoke these words, was addressing a crowd of the poorest, of farmers, small farmers in a country at war. The ones most likely to be driven from their land by bandits and militias. The ones most likely not to be able to harvest what they planted or consume what they



Last Saturday evening, I was in Juba with Pope Francis and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, a Presbyterian.

People walked nine days in order to be there for the prayer meeting, and they prayed with cries of anguish such as Paul refers to in Romans 8.

They prayed with cries of anguish for peace, for hope and for life.

Jesus says to those to whom he is speaking, God knows your needs. When we look around the Anglican Communion we need to remember that

God knows our needs, of every member of the Anglican Communion: whether it be a President or a farmer, whether it be the rich or the poor, whether it be the important or the humble.

And so his words, the words of Jesus give us two challenges:

First, not to just sit back and let God get on with it while we twiddle our thumbs. God is too generous for that. He wants us as his partners in the work of the Gospel, not his audience. We are to be those who steward the Earth in Genesis, who seek the Kingdom in Matthew, who pray in Romans, who praise with the Psalms.

Second, he wants us to understand how we respond where events are too terrible for us to get hold of. What do we say to those in Turkey and Syria, where 25,000 people lost their lives, and more, in a few minutes in two huge earthquakes?

If God does get involved, they might reply, “Why were we not protected?’ The answer in the New Testament is clear: do what you can, in faith and love, as Jesus did what he could do in faith and love, and trust the Holy Spirit of God. And lament, protest and cry out to God. We are often the answer to the problems of this world, and seeing that reality is one of the tasks for this week, for us to own as God’s people.

God’s love endures forever, we’ve heard that sung, and his hand is in all things on earth.

We can be confident in that.

And it is precisely what God has done for us in Jesus Christ that means we can be confident in seeking to change the world around us, in responding to God’s call. Or, as the Five Marks of Mission have it in five words – we are to tell, teach, tend, transform and treasure.

The mission of the Church is the mission of Jesus Christ. He gives us that mission in Matthew: ‘Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.’

The Marks of Mission that we have, our Five Marks of Mission, are a sort of road map towards the Kingdom we are sent out to seek. Jesus sends us out onto the road and tells us not to worry about how we will survive.

That is God’s problem.



It is the same with the Anglican Communion – people ask me with various degrees of aggression: ‘How will the Communion continue along the rocky path that we see ahead of us?’ – and many of them say, ‘Particularly as you, Archbishop, seem to be putting more rocks on the path.’ The answer is the same: whether the path is smooth and level or rocky and difficult, we only survive as God’s church by the grace of God. We survive because God loves us.

We don’t do it by worrying about it, or by anything we can do. We do it by grace. The grace of God who we trust to guide us, as in the same way he guided Moses out of Egypt and the people of Israel back from exile and the apostles to tell the gospel to the whole world.

And that is why we remember what is in the Psalm: ‘God’s love endures forever.’

That is the confidence we have in our journey. From the beginning of creation until the end of time and the judgement, God has loved us, God has been with us, God has cared for us. We do not need to worry about the future, about ourselves. Because that is God’s to take care of.

Our job is to get out and make this known. To tell, teach, tend, transform and treasure. From our first charge in Genesis to look after creation, to Jesus’ sending us out to look after one another and for the world to know the love of Christ.

We are equipped. We will be given the courage. We will be protected, even if it costs our lives. We must trust nothing except the faithful love of God in Jesus Christ. And when our trust is in that, then our future is certain. Amen.



9 min read

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