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Read the text below

Thank you very much. And thank you to the choir as well for that amazing wonderful treat. . . It's quite an interesting feeling being in this Cathedral which was built at almost the exactly the same time as Coventry was, where I was a Canon for five years, and is very, very similar. And so when I sit here listening to choral evensong, it reminds me of years and years of sitting listening to the choir at Coventry five days a week and enjoying, again, the same music and delight in choral evensong. It was a real treat, so thank you.

I want this evening, rather than looking inwards, to look outwards and forwards; because, in the end, we are here not for ourselves, not for making the Anglicans better, but for seeking to serve the work and mission of God in the world.

And the Anglican Communion, as one of the few genuinely worldwide bodies which has a coherent structure in the world today, has to be aware of the great crises of our times. It is easy to forget that we do have a coherent structure. It doesn't always feel like being coherent, but it exists and it is real.

We are in 165 countries. We have dioceses; each diocese has priests and each priest is in a particular area and knows that area. It is not giving away secrets to say [that] three years ago when I met the British foreign secretary, he commented that the Anglican Communion was a better intelligence network than the Secret Intelligence Service.

But because we are all over the world and because we are stretched and pulled by our differences, as we have looked at this week, the temptation is either to think only of internal questions, or of traditional issues, and not to realise that around us the world is shifting on its axis. There is a – probably apocryphal – story that in 1974, the Protestant churches of what was then called South Vietnam, met to discuss a 10-year strategy, and failed to notice that within three months the North Vietnamese army would conquer them entirely.

Sometimes, the issues we face, even if they are not new, become acute in a new way and compel us to rethink how we work and how we apply the gifts given by God in the mission that he also gives us.

It is like if you go to a play, to a theatre. Occasionally, when you are watching, there are one or two characters who come on the stage and dominate the entire story of the play. They may not even be in every scene, but every scene in some ways relates to them; and their plans only makes sense, and the scenes only make sense, when we remember they exist.

I was recently reading Shakespeare's Macbeth. And Macbeth and Lady Macbeth dominate the play – even when they are not on the stage.

Two actors dominate our world stage at present, I would argue. One is religiously motivated violence, and the other is climate change.

The attacks in Brussels before Easter, the Paris attacks last year, the atrocities in Istanbul, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and many other places; Boko Haram and the horrors of Daesh, persecution in India, in Myanmar, in Sri Lanka, in Pakistan, and many other places and a million other conflicts; have made it clear that when it comes to violence we are in a new era. For the first time in several centuries we have been facing major, global conflicts with a very clear religious content; in which at least one side – if not both – finds that theology is its principle motivation and whose actions are profoundly evil.

It doesn't matter if it is radicalised Buddhists in Myanmar; or Hindus in India; or Muslims in many countries. And, sadly, Christians are part of these actions, whether as participants as in the Central African Republic; or as funders and suppliers of weaponry.

And wherever we go, the second actor comes up: the issues of climate change are being more and more clearly felt as we have discussed today. They have a huge impact on economies. They generate conflict, they increase inequality to destabilising levels. There are moments of hope such as at COP 21 in Paris last December, in which Anglicans led by Archbishop Thabo made a significant difference. Yet at the same time, as we have heard and remember day by day, the outlook of climate change is not potentially bad; it is potentially fatal, for the most fragile countries and regions on earth; and for the billions of people who live in them.

Both these characters – religiously motivated violence and climate change - are global. Both these issues are generational, they can't be solved in two, three, four years; they will take a generation or more. And both – and this is where most of the world forgets this – both characters can only be confronted with a theological and ideological approach and with a story, with a narrative, that is sufficiently powerful to overcome the natural selfishness of one generation, or the selfishness of countries which are more secure.

At its heart, these challenges are theological and it requires a deepening of our theological resources. We can only confront them by bringing them face-to-face to the reality of a God we study, worship, engage with, theologically. That is, incidentally, why I support Bishop Graham Kings, who was with us earlier this week, as Mission Theologian in the Anglican Communion. We need to develop our theological strength and visibility in every part of the Communion. Graham's remit is to support, with others such as the ACO and ACC, the Development of the visibility of the hugely deep and important theological resources in parts of the world that the historic centres of theology, mainly in the Global North, too easily forget.

For some of us, the crisis of violence is distant geographically. For all of us the crisis of climate change is both present but often unrecognised, but also distant in time in that its most profound effects, its most terrible effects, the effects that will kill hundreds of millions, if not billions, will not be felt for at least a generation, although the beginnings of the impact are with us very clearly today.

Both these crises play a role, are present like the Macbeths, in the other scenes on which we concentrate. Gender based violence is much worse in societies in conflict or under climate stress. Indaba is required to be a tool in reconciliation. Inter-religious relations are at the heart of what we do. Good families are the basic building block of restoring justice and peace, hope and capacity to thrive in the midst of troubled times. The UN and its agencies is crucial to a global response, and that is why we are there. And the UN and its agencies are helpless if that response does not have a clear theological input. Aid requires alliances. And so on.

But, for me, the single vision is to ensure that these two powerful characters in our play – in the play of our world today in the theatre in which we live – these two characters, religiously motivated violence and climate change, find that in the next generation their parts are reduced in the story of our world and their roles are eliminated before the final curtain comes down. Because if they are not eliminated, they themselves will bring down the curtain.

It is our call, I suggest, as Anglicans to be at the heart of those who re-write the play; who bring a new ending.

Let me take them one at a time, and then look at some answers.

First, the question of religiously motivated violence. I take it first because unless it is tackled the capacity of the world to face climate change is deeply diminished spiritually, economically, emotionally and collectively.

The Christian answer is simple, and I quote some words written by one of my colleagues, or the husband of one of my colleagues – a man called Sam Wells in a book called A Nazareth Manifesto. He wrote this:

“Reconciliation is the gospel. There is no gospel other than the one that requires and makes possible restored relationships with God, one another, and the creation. God has no ambitions and seeks no final goal beyond restored relationship. That relationship is the telos of creation.”

To be Christian we must include, we must be reconciled. Where our present condition leaves us today is with wars, humanitarian crises multiplying, and an unbreakable link in each country between what is happening internationally and domestically, which means that everyone's domestic policies will constantly be disrupted by overseas events.

Last December, the Government officer who is dealing with how in Britain we deal with radicalisation, came to see me. She said: "I can't think of anything outside the UK." And I said that's like trying to clean up the ground floor of your house when a river is running through it. Domestic and international are totally linked.

And if warfare and armed action are the primary tools we use then what we are doing will become utterly wrong, and will fail. There is that temptation in so many countries. We are in struggles in which we must engage in the right way. We must do the right thing, but we must do it in the right way or we will ourselves sow the seeds of further conflict.

Those countries that confront climate change by seeking to make sure they have access to raw materials that others will not then have access to condemn the world to conflict. In a struggle which is deeply ideological and theological, our response must be based in a story of relationship, of mutual protection, of order and human flourishing which overwhelms the demonic narrative of disintegration and demonisation of the other which faces us.

I pray that we could get hold of a political vision of what reconciliation in this struggle would look like; that must include the idea of a world in which religiously justified violence is eliminated. It was nearly true a few years ago, and is being reversed, for many reasons: economic, sociological, political, cultural, environmental and demographic, with some religion in the middle as a good hook to call all these other causes together.

We must overcome this upsurge in religiously justified violence, which by its nature, in all of the great world religions, perverts and abandons its original host by exempting itself from ethical principles, and cares nothing for human life.

The second challenge is that of climate change. I have come late to this, recognising for years that it was very important, but failing to grasp its significance especially among young people. Underlying the issue of climate change is the reality of global injustice and inequality. We are not all equally at risk, and those for whom the risk is less, forgetting solidarity, often will not see the problem.

At the same time there is a conscious rejection by some climate change sceptics of the nature of intergenerational equality. It is felt that the problems of 100 years away are too unpredictable to permit us to spend money and effort now.

Quite apart from the science, the theology of this is terrible. The church exists in space and time. We are joined by baptism to all past and all future Christians. Unless Christ first returns, the fate of those who belong to the church – let alone the rest of humanity – in 2116 matters deeply to us now.

But for human beings to make the decisions necessary, requires the overcoming of our natural selfishness with a greater force, and that force is the call of God to intentional discipleship across time as well as space.

Humiliation and disrespect is one of the most corrosive things we can experience. It lasts for centuries in groups and leads to feelings of unfairness. Foreign affairs becomes viewed through the prism of humiliation, as does identity. Minority and identity lead to special vulnerabilities. Humiliation is evident in climate change talks, as well as in war.

The response of Jesus is to point to the goal of breaking barriers through love that defies enmity, and in so doing offering a way of justification through accepting the unconditional grace of God. It hardly needs adding that love needs resourcing or it is mere emotion. It is for that reason that the contributions of Provinces, and the remarkable generosity of Compass Rose, make such a difference.

So we need to begin by recognising our selfishness, our human fallenness; and secondly, we must reassert solidarity with one another – with all of one another – but also with generations not yet seen. Solidarity has been vastly expanded in its potential scope by the development of information networks, and it has been deeply undermined by the refugee crisis in the short term and through social media in the long term.

The refugee crisis and social media bring presence without relationships, both in war and in the impact of climate. We see everything and know no-one. Threatened we retreat.

Solidarity is based in the essential human dignity of every individual in creation and salvation. And the demands of solidarity increase inversely to the weakness of the person we see.

Our fallenness, our solidarity, and thirdly we must restore wisdom. Wisdom gives us back the subtleties of theology. A curse of our age is theology without subtlety; theology without nuance; theology as a club rather than a torch which illuminates. Subtle theology enables us to engage with the other across religions, across boundaries of continents and climate without hatred.

As Anglicans, we need to express these ideas, and we need to express them with a story that we can tell that is more beautiful than the self-interested stories of those who promote conflict or pillage our planet.

The church will be core to building this beautiful story, not through force, or authority, but by our authentic living out the difference that Christ makes. This is where intentional discipleship is not merely a Christian virtue but an essential for the survival of the world. To live out our difference in intentional discipleship has to be done in the midst of a dark world where tragedy is a category in which many of us live today. It was in this world that Jesus made decisions, and we know through him that God has not abandoned us. God shows us in Christ that God is on the side of the world, and of every human being, seeking changed hearts that lead to life, not death.

In practice, we must start our relationships of love, of human dignity and human flourishing with identity, hospitality and generosity.

Can we have Christian communities that give identity to those who are swept hither and thither across the world by the impact of climate change and war. The sixty millions of human beings, whose identity is destroyed and yet the Christian community offers identity. Religious community provide the stability that weak communities need. Religious communities can be the safe channel to express legitimate grievance and the starting point for the building of bridges between opposing sides.

We must be confident in pointing towards God whose arms are open but nailed on the cross. We affirm the indivisibility of incarnation and justification, of salvation holding together manger, cross and empty tomb. The glory of God is revealed in that that God became a living person. Through God's grace we find identity.

A theology of identity calls us to love that gives inclusively of ourselves. To love the neighbour that I consider impure is better than to preserve my purity by keeping them at a safe distance. Not least, I will often discover, I was wrong.

Identity happens in relationship through hospitality. Hospitality is the second of the key elements of a more beautiful narrative. Both the giver and receiver of hospitality risk identity loss, so all hospitality has to be accompanied by the giving of social dignity.

Hospitality is a powerful cure for challenging the right not to be offended. It's a powerful way of enabling hearts and minds to see a new future in which we accept each other. We find it in Diocesan partnerships, in Indaba, in links and friendships. We give social dignity without taking away social freedom.

We need listening relationships for Hospitality, Longfellow said: "If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility."

To listen is essential to both our great challenges and it leads us to the dignity of good disagreement in which we must view diversity as a blessing and not a threat.

None of this is easy: peacemakers come to be seen as the enemy. A few years ago, when I was in Lagos, I was talking to a pastor of a Protestant Church, a Pentecostal Church, and he said: "I don't know where you are going with your Anglican bishops." I had just become one so that appeared rude, but there you are; and he said: "Did you know you have a Muslim bishop? A Muslim bishop in northern Nigeria?"

I said: "I don't think we do"; he said: "Oh yes you do" – it was beginning to sound like a Pantomime – "Oh no we don't!"

I said: "What's his name?" He said: "His name is Josiah Idowu-Fearon."

Did you know we have a Muslim secretary general? I don't think so.

Why was he accused of such a thing? Because he insisted that reconciliation was part of his life and ministry as an archbishop in northern Nigeria.

Heroes of peace become the victims of their own people. They shake hands with the enemy – whether a violent enemy, or the company that pollutes, or the nation that rejects climate science. And to do so is seen as the ultimate disloyalty. Fear is the greatest enemy of any dialogue, hospitality attracts suspicion.

May Anglicans become deeply suspicious to everyone else because they are full of hospitality.

And the final aspect of this new narrative – it is not the final aspect; A third aspect is human flourishing. We need a new theological dialogue, based in wisdom, expressed in solidarity, giving in love and hospitality, which focuses on human flourishing. We over-simplify the challenges of religiously motivated violence and of climate change. We must challenge their oversimplification. We must welcome the richness and the wealth of what God has created.

Such a theological dialogue – a new one of human flourishing – offers a better option. It is willing to name violence and corruption in its own tradition. To deny it only aids extremism. A text may be sacred, interpretation is not.

Dialogue names the perpetrators of violence when they are part of their faith tradition. Dialogue says the people who killed 7,000 Muslims in Srebrenica 20 years ago, were Christians. Dialogue accepts that Christians were, for generations, using the earth's resources as though they had no limit. Dialogue accepts that Daesh are Muslims.

Dialogue names the issues in climate change, it permits us to hear when we have failed. A dialogue of human flourishing means that hard words are said in the context of soft relationships, and their hardness dissolves into understanding.

And when we look at our religious leaders of other traditions, we need to love and support them so that they can find the theological and ideological aspects of these two struggles. We must own our problems and confront them.

Intentional discipleship is based on the empowering filling of the Spirit of Christ. It does not attempt everything, but it faces reality well. It risks so that Christ may be glorified, it loves so that Christ may be seen, it blesses so that the purposes of Christ are accomplished. It does not abandon, but embraces, it does not hate and scoff, but it weeps and mourns. It is our all as Christians, and nothing can be more important.

Amen.

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