**Presidential Address delivered to Diocesan Synod at the church of St Nicholas of Jerusalem, Corfe Mullen on the 24 September 2022**

The last time I was in this church was for a Salisbury Diocesan Synod. It must have been around 22 years ago. We discussed what to do about our future and we discussed a deficit budget. It’s time we changed the narrative.

Now an early warning: this presidential address will contain three important announcements.

It is just three months since I arrived in the diocese as your bishop. Thank you for the welcome and for the chance to serve you and the Gospel in God’s own diocese. It’s been a rather busy time. Now I know its bad form for clergy to tell you how busy they are but, as you have asked in the Statement of Needs for your bishop to be visible, you may as well know this: it’s been quite a time. This is already, in just three months, my second presidential address. There have been

* two Diocesan Synods
* one General Synod in York
* two great ordinations
* no confirmations yet but a once in a decade Lambeth Conference for two weeks
* two bishop’s councils
* one wedding
* one family funeral
* one clergy day in Blandford
* one Southern Choirs Festival
* one organ extravaganza in the cathedral
* the Dorset County Show
* the Great Dorset Steam Fair
* numerous meetings (and Tottenham are unbeaten in the Premier League)
* one full medical and
* many meals provided at South Canonry.

I’ve had two photos in the *Daily Telegraph*, one with some autograph hungry sheep, and 5-year-old Preston from West Moors wanted to know what colour my tractor is.

I’ve blessed steam engines, blessed a flower festival, blessed a half-finished organ and blessed a school playground. I’ve been made a Vice President of Dorset Scouts and renewed my Scout Promise to God and to the King with Wiltshire Scouts. There have been two Prime Ministers and two monarchs – and many, many meetings.

And, visits to

* Winterbourne Stoke, once deliberately and once by mistake because I got the sat nav wrong
* Wimborne St John
* Wilton Primary
* Pitton
* York
* Warminster
* Canterbury
* London
* Poole
* West Moors
* Wimborne again
* Dorchester
* Iwerne Minster
* Blandford
* Urchfont
* Trowbridge
* Dorchester again
* Leicester, and
* under cover, in Guernsey and Jersey.

So, after that travelogue, comes my first announcement: due to the constraints of my diary, I have to tell you that I have turned down being a contestant this year on *Strictly Come Dancing*.

Of course, the reality is that no diocese is ever about one person. There is only one person we look to: Jesus Christ. My guiding biblical text for these first three months has been The Beatitudes, the Gospel reading I chose for us today. This has been my vision statement set before me in these first few days. Jesus gathered the people, those who followed him and those who were prepared just to listen for a while. He sat them down and he gave them a vision of what the Kingdom of God will and can look like. The Beatitudes are often held up as a utopian future ideal, but actually they are deeply rooted in the here and now. There is no promise that the meek will disappear, no promise that mourning will never happen again, no promise that the persecuted will never be threatened again, because we sin. But there is the vision that in our lives, here and now, things can be different, that God’s reign can be seen and heard, and that we have both the choice and the power to make his Kingdom come. And there is nothing in the Beatitudes that makes this churchy. The Kingdom of God is not just for us. It is for society, for all people. There is space for everyone in this place without borders or trenches. That is why we are called to share it and to pray, earnestly, Your Kingdom Come, Here and Now.

The Beatitudes were Jesus’ vision statement. We too need a plan alongside scripture and the Five Marks of Mission and the national call to be Simpler, Humbler and Bolder. In the last twelve weeks, my priority has been to meet as many people as possible and to see if there is the appetite in this diocese for change. Are we ready to hear the call we are being given, or will we, well fewer of us, still be here in another 22 years, discussing the same things? If we do the same things, with the same people, we get the same ever decreasing results. If we live out the Beatitudes, we will be beatified; we will be changed.

Everywhere I have gone, everyone I have spoken to sees the urgency of our tumultuous times. If we cannot organise ourselves in the Diocese of Salisbury, God will find another way of doing it elsewhere. If we spend our time arguing amongst ourselves and withering away our resources without a plan, we will be getting in the way of God’s Kingdom.

Last Monday, only last Monday, we saw an amazing thing. We saw a plan, long in the preparation, come to fruition. London Bridge was enacted, played out before our watching eyes. It was flawless and yet no one knew the time or day, no-one knew the numbers to be involved, no one knew the public response, no one knew how we would feel. And yet, because we came together, we saw the best of us.

Our task is to listen to God and to act. We need a new vision and strategic plan so that together as one diocese, one Team Salisbury, we can help and enable parishes, schools and worshipping communities to be what we are called to be, here and now. We have that talent. This last Thursday, at the Wiltshire Public Service Board, the Leader of Wiltshire Council pulled out his golden envelope and challenged all those there representing our common life to follow this example and to create opportunities for community impact and cohesion this winter. The people went up the mountain and sat down to listen.

The Bishop’s Council has agreed that we need this new plan and that we must spend this next season discerning it, articulating it, and agreeing it so that we can do it, and hold one another accountable in trust to share it. I gave the members of the Bishop’s Council a challenge. I ruined their August by asking them to write down in their own words what they saw as the future vision and strategy of Salisbury Diocese, in 150 words. It’s difficult - what to put into just 150 words in terms of priority, and what to leave out. You may want to try it at home and send your thoughts to me. If you do, I shall continue to place these 150 words on the altar in my chapel, and to pray over them. The Bishop’s Council members were brilliant and now we need to hone these responses to God’s call into words we can all own. The national Church has already come to support us with expertise and seed corn funding, and I am confident of their desire to help Salisbury Diocese in its mission here and now. Having a future plan that we can all sit down with on the mountain won’t be easy. There are choices to be made as our budget discussions this afternoon will so clearly show. Our times are moving faster than any of us can predict. We have to be open to be thinking differently, creatively, locally and diocesan wide - Team Salisbury - so that we can discern God’s new answers. But we can do this and we must do it, here and now. In doing it, we are not alone, because this diocese is growing. Here comes the second announcement: as of last week and lost in the news, The Bailiwick of Jersey became officially, legally, wonderfully, attached to the Diocese of Salisbury. Welcome home Jersey.

I am still new enough to be able to say things to you, to say things about you. As we seek to live out what God wants us to do and what God wants us to be in this season, I do hope we can all agree not to fall into the trap of our times. There is too much ‘othering’ going on these days - in society, in the Church, in relationships. Our problems are too easily projected onto others: ‘they’, who are the source of our problems, or the ones who ought to sort out all our problems. This is not unique to us. It is a facet of our society. We blame governments, people different from ourselves, the diocese, or the bishops, or the media, the national Church or frankly anyone we can find to ‘other’, to make ourselves feel better. In my time here as your Bishop, I want us not to ‘other’; we are better than that.

There is one more announcement to come. I hope and pray that by next June, a year after arriving, we can have all this done and dusted and be on our way to the living out of our plan under God, on the way to a balanced budget so that mission can be enabled and supported. This is short order for such a process in a large diocese, but it is our task, despite all our current challenges.

Announcement 3. The Archbishop of Canterbury has offered to come to the diocese for three days on the 9th to the 11th June to lead with his evangelism team a weekend in mission to reach out to those in our parishes – all who might come and sit on the mountain and listen to the good news. This will be a key moment to focus on. Our work in planning our future together needs to be done by then, so that we can get on with the job of growing our churches and loving our communities. I invite you to join me as we pray Your Kingdom Come – Here and Now. Thank you.

You will have noticed that one of my key phrases is Team Salisbury. That’s all of us. But one part of that team is your bishops: Stephen, Karen and Andrew. We’ve actually had very little time together - and talking in procession isn’t easy - but we already know that we get on, that we hope for the same things, and that we are committed to being a team within our other teams. So we are going to start living this out here and now. Bishops Karen and Andrew know we are going to do this, but it is entirely unscripted, and we don’t know what each other is going to say as we enter conversation with one another and with you in the room. We’ll do this for a while until we fall out, and then it’s over to you to discuss in your tables too. It’s a kind of sit down on the mountain moment together.

As they used to say at the start of Stingray, ‘Anything can happen in the next half hour!’

+Stephen Sarum