

The June 2018 Coventry Diocesan Synod: Question under Standing Order 69

I am grateful to Andrew Attwood for asking for a statement on the essentials of the gospel so that we can affirm together the common basis of the first strategic priority of the Whole Diocese: *'to make the gospel known throughout the Diocese so that people become followers of Jesus Christ'*.

I offer Andrew, and the Diocese, a short statement and a longer one. They will be put on the diocesan website, and I encourage the Whole Diocese to engage with them and let me know how they might become fuller statements of the gospel of grace.

In doing so, I would like to pay tribute to Andrew and to other clergy, readers, lay ministers and leaders, chaplains, head teachers and faithful disciples of Christ who make the good news of Jesus known throughout the Diocese through our church communities, our diocesan family of schools, our chaplaincies in many of the institutions of Coventry and Warwickshire, and through the cathedral, the mother church of the Diocese.

My shorter statement expresses the gospel through the theme of *life*, a theme which I have come to see as fundamental to Christian theology and witness. It has an especially Johannine character.

The gospel of life, good news for the life of the world

God gave us the gift of life but we turned from the source of life.

God has come to us in Jesus Christ to live, die and rise for us, dealing with sin, destroying death and defeating evil – for they deny us life – and restoring true life to us in all its fullness.

God invites us to step into the new life of Christ that Jesus has made available to us, by *turning to Christ and believing in him* – that Jesus died so that we might live – by *immersing ourselves in his risen life through baptism*, and by *living the life of Christ in the gift of his life-giving Spirit*, following Jesus faithfully in the new community of the Church, his own body.

The longer statement expresses the gospel by means of another fundamental biblical theme, one that is very close to Coventry's heart: the Pauline theme of *reconciliation*. It draws on and quotes from the great passages on reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5.11-21, especially 5.18, and Colossians 1.15-29.

The gospel of reconciliation, good news for all

God created the world, and humanity within it, for loving relationship – loving, life-giving relationship with God, between human beings and all other life.

By sin and evil, these relationships have become fatally disrupted at every level, and this old, damaged order of the world is dying, detached from its source of life and love in God.

In God's mercy, by his Spirit, God sent his Son to redeem the world . 'In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself' (2 Corinthians 5.19), re-creating the creation through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Jesus Christ 'died for all, so those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised to life for them' (2 Corinthians 5.15). With Paul we rejoice that 'for our sake, God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Corinthians 5.21).

This is the message and ministry of reconciliation entrusted to Christ's people – those reconciled to God in Jesus the Son, bearers of the Spirit in the new creation, members of Christ's body, the Church – we are to entreat others on behalf of Christ: *'be reconciled to God' (2 Corinthians 5.20) and, in being reconciled to God, be reconciled to others and to the creation of which you are part.*

So our mission purpose in the Diocese of Coventry is to see the reconciling love of God in Jesus Christ manifested in Christian people and communities that worship God, make new disciples and transform the communities around them.

We pray for God's kingdom to come, for God's will to be done on earth as in heaven, that the world may become 'a kinder, simpler – a more Christ-Child like sort of world' (Provost Dick Howard, Christmas 1940).

For this, as Paul says elsewhere, we have become 'servant[s] of God' who 'toil and struggle with all the energy that God so powerfully inspires within [us]', always rejoicing that in Jesus Christ 'all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of the cross'. (Colossians 1.23, 29; 1.19-20).

This reality and responsibility of reconciliation is summed up in 2 Corinthians 5.18.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

'All this is from God': the gospel is the gracious work of God – that is why we worship God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

'God reconciled us to himself through Christ': this is the good news, the gospel, for the world – that is why we seek to make new disciples.

'God has given us the ministry of reconciliation': the good news our reconciliation with God in Christ, and the healing that it brings to our fractured relationships with each other and the earth, is to be made known and made visible by the power of the Spirit – that is why our churches work to transform their local communities, our schools help children to live life in all its fulness, our chaplains help their organisations to hear the gospel and to reflect God's kingdom, and why our cathedral promotes peace and reconciliation in the diocese and throughout the world.