

Enthronement Sermon, Lincoln, 11th November, 2023

Well, here we are at last. Like Manuel in *Fawlty Towers*, 'I go, I come back.'

With members of my family, a number of you were present at the ceremony which confirmed my election as Bishop of Lincoln. The Archbishop of Canterbury delivered his Charge which was a summary of the hopes of the Diocese and the wider County for what we might accomplish together in the years that I shall be with you. It made sense to me, therefore to choose the beginning of Isaiah 61 as the first reading today. It is a prophetic role description of the Messiah. We learn from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 4, that Jesus read this text aloud in the synagogue and told his hearers that this prophecy was fulfilled in their hearing. I hasten to say that I have not come with illusions of grandeur and I need to manage your expectations. I am big, not great. There was some thought that I might wear the cope of my saintly predecessor, Edward King. In fact, it would have been like my wearing a colourful napkin. I am trying to learn my place, fully to accept the role bestowed on me as Bishop of Lincoln by the Lord and His Church; but recognising that with all Christians I am never more myself than – like John the Baptist – I point away from myself always to signify Jesus, the Lamb of God, the Saviour of the World.

The wonderful thing about that prophecy fulfilled in Jesus is that it goes on being true. Bishops, priests and people are still being anointed by the Spirit of God to be bearers of good news, agents of God's kingdom of love, justice and peace. In a broken and over-heated world, we, with all people of goodwill and any faith are called to offer a garland not ashes. All the churches and chaplaincies and church schools across Greater Lincolnshire are the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. Our

diocesan plan, *Time to Change Together*, is not trying to turn round the *Titanic*: it is seeking our Transfiguration in Christ; to help us and others know how close we are to the heart of Jesus, so that we can welcome him fully into ours.

Closeness is important to me. You saw and heard young people give me the *Pastoral Rule* of St Gregory the Great who sent St Augustine of Canterbury to bring the gospel to England. The Archdeacon of Canterbury is his long generational representative today! St Gregory's depiction of the ministry of bishops is still relevant and applies not just to bishops but to all in pastoral ministry. Bishops are called to be shepherds after the pattern of Christ, the Good Shepherd. That's why we have sung the 23rd Psalm and heard Jesus speak of himself as the shepherd of the sheep in John's Gospel. In that reading, we hear about recognition and protection. The shepherd and the sheep know each other. I have spent the last several weeks visiting incumbent clergy in their vicarages in order to know and be known. I now know where you live! (That's a promise not a threat). St Gregory writes that the cure of souls which we share is the art of all arts. All ministers and witnesses to the gospel are partners with me, Bishop David and Bishop Nicholas - all under the Spirit of God who is closer to us than our breath. Jesus talks about being the gate for the sheep's protection. As the sheep huddle in corral of thorn bushes overnight, the shepherd lies in the gap to protect them. With me, you get plenty of gate for your money. The ministry of the Bishop is at the same time universal and local. I offer myself to lead, protect, pastor and play in our share in God's mission. In his final letter to the Diocese of Lincoln before he died, Bishop Edward King wrote: "My great wish has been to lead you to be Christlike Christians. In Christ is

the only true hope of unity and peace”. My ministry will be an echo of that.

One of my clergy visits took me from Sutton-on-Sea near Skegness back to Lincoln only using minor roads (there’s a dot-dot-dot and exclamation mark there). The sun shone and I found myself praying in thanksgiving for such beauty, and for such productivity of the land that feeds so many. I felt properly small in a huge landscape. On my first arrival in Grimsby at the Shalom youth centre, I felt immediately at home, as though I were back serving in Sunderland with people making the most of life in tough conditions. In all of this, I wonder why it is that we are so under-stated in Lincolnshire. We talk ourselves down when what I see with fresh eyes is great people working hard and being good neighbours. We are a large but hidden jewel in the King’s crown. I shall tell him that when I do homage next Wednesday at the Palace. There is beauty and diversity. There is great innovation generated by our universities and businesses. We have stretched schools and public services heroically run. Our skies are defended. And, of course, there is carbon zero to reach, there are wrongs to right and the vulnerable to protect. We in the Diocese of Lincoln will continue to work with ecumenical partners, other faith communities and all in public service to serve Greater Lincolnshire and to speak up with confidence about what the county contributes to our region and country. I shall seek to extend this through my contribution to Parliament with my fellow parliamentarians. As we warmly welcome today Bishop Eva from Sweden and Fr Kurt representing Bishop Lode of Brugge, we re-dedicate ourselves to discerning together how we serve God’s kingdom within the context of Northern European culture. In the presence of Archbishop Sione, the Anglican Archbishop of Polynesia, we rejoice in

our world-wide Communion. We are united in the real danger of inundation through climate change but even more in serving Jesus who comes not to turn the world upside down but the right way up.

Apologies to the Ely people listening because they have heard me say this so many times before, but I get very agitated when people say things like 'Christians are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly use'. It's absolutely the opposite. We can only help turn the world the right way up if we are heavenly minded, rooted in worship and prayer. By celebrating the Eucharist, we have the means and framework for living lives of thanksgiving and hope. Prayer is not just telling things to God that God already knows; it is acknowledging total dependence. I am not the centre; it lies elsewhere in God. This opens up the possibility of a whole new vision of the world. I managed to get to the St Francis exhibition at the National Gallery. It reminded me of the Seeing Salvation exhibition at the Millennium where people were hushed and deeply reflective about the deep things in their heart. Earlier, I spoke about our transfiguration in Christ. It strikes me that art and music seek to move us to a new place beyond what we currently think and are. I can appreciate art in any form only in so far as we see it as other, beyond myself. What we as Christians have to offer the world before all else is not systems and strategies – although we definitely need them – but the love which is profoundly other, nothing less than the glory of God revealed on a cross. We are invited to open ourselves to possibility, at the risk of hurt and mistakes, but that openness is the route to receive the revelation of God and to divine peace and joy. As Christians, we believe that the Lord will come again in glory and we draw strength and hope from that future into the present. As we follow the Good Shepherd in the power of God's Spirit, the greater part of God's revelation may lie ahead of us and not

behind us. Ours is the oil of gladness and the mantle of praise. Every place of worship and service across our great county is a planting of the Lord to display his glory. Amen.