



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN JERUSALEM AND THE MIDDLE EAST  
A PROVINCE OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

## DIOCESE OF CYPRUS AND THE GULF

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### PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Diocesan Synod, 4 February 2018

Before anything else the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf exists to offer worship to God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit in the lands where our congregations are set. Worship is the first and non-negotiable task, duty, and identifying characteristic of Christians. Worship should be a joy. There will be a measure of particularity in our worship because of the particular – not to say sometimes peculiar - people we are in particular places. That particularity should be a joy alongside the common joy of our link, bond, and unity as a diocese.

Three years ago Synod explored and articulated our common diocesan *identity*. Two years ago Synod focussed on our common diocesan *mission*. Last year Synod discussed our common diocesan *discipleship*. So what's to be common, what aspect of our link, bond, and unity is to be delved into and celebrated, in 2018?

It's something like our common *service*, but it's more than that might be thought to mean. The thematic title this year is *Doing God and doing good*. In the course of the week others will unfold those at-first-hearing-enigmatic words, both in the spiritual addresses and in the discussion groups that are a now firmly established element of synod. Suffice it to say now that the purpose of this theme is to demonstrate that love of God and love of neighbour are scripturally and doctrinally inextricable; that love's not much if it's not practical; and that lovingly serving others and one another, and lovingly working for the transformation of society into something better and more divine, are part of lovingly worshipping God. They're therefore at the heart of our primary reason for existing as diocese and indeed as Christians. "Social liturgy" is an even more enigmatic and suggestive phrase. Perhaps it could deepen our thinking here even more, but I'll leave that to others if they wish to pick it up, and shan't steal their thunder. Perhaps it's simpler to remember that for Christians the word *service* is pregnant with at least two meanings. That's what the theme of this year's Synod is about.

The Anglican Communion, as those who have been at Synod in these last years will know well, has five thoroughly publicised Marks of Mission, though I wish we'd just called them Marks of the Church. Look them up. This year, *doing God and doing good*, we're starting to engage with Marks Three, Four, and even Five.

As always we meet against the background of the rest of our lives. 2 Corinthians 4 isn't to be quoted lightly; no scripture is; but for many in the region that we serve, in almost all of the countries God has led us to, and for some and perhaps many of us in the parishes and chaplaincies of this diocese, the resonances are strong.

*We're afflicted*, says St Paul, uncompromisingly and truthfully; *we're perplexed*; *we're persecuted* even; *we're struck down*. Speaking not just for himself but for others who keep the

faith of Christ whatever may come, he qualifies each acknowledged setback and assault: *but not crushed; but not driven to despair; but not forsaken; but not destroyed*. And, he continues, *we always carry in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies*. He has prefaced all he says here by saying that we have this treasure – *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ – in earthenware vessels, in clay jars*. In other words, human beings are breakable, fragile; and existence is fragile; and Christians are fragile; and the Church is fragile; but that means it's clear that what we have *belongs to God and doesn't come from us*: 2 Corinthians 4:7.

Politics, not only in our region but throughout the world and sadly especially in great nations that should be stabler and wiser like the United States, Russia, and the United Kingdom, is febrile. Politicians are either faltering or all too certain. Those who should speak and act often don't and those who shouldn't do. War and its aftermath, displacement, disease, famine, and fear stalk the earth. Some economies are holding up but many aren't. Even those with jobs wonder for how long they'll have them, since patterns of employment are changing. Citizens of the nations of our region, and equally the migrant expatriates that most of us at this Synod are, are given plenty of reminders of our fragility.

But with Paul we're called to remember that we have a treasure, God in Christ, that doesn't come from or depend on us and is the reason we worship.

Therefore, 2 Corinthians 4:16, *we do not lose heart*. Or do we? Do, say, the deliberations of our church councils reflect, and will the deliberations of this diocesan Synod reflect, while being both realistic and truthful about challenges, dangers, resources, money, and all the rest, Christian confidence in the way and love of God revealed in Christ? Are we ready to be sustained by the Spirit no matter what?

I see many who are. It may be invidious to select places and people but at St George Baghdad I and all who visit see not just persistent faithfulness but genuine joy that begins and ends in worship while on the way taking in love of neighbour spelled out in the most explicit forms: teaching in the school, feeding at the distributions, healing in the clinic, and much more. And in Aden, now yet more troubled and uncertain politically, socially, and financially than in these recent tumultuous years, I know that those who through employment or need come into the ambit of Christ Church Tawahi, virtually all at this moment Muslims, find that they have come into the ambit of a place that *does God* sheerly by *doing good* with not a thought of a conceptual division.

In the mouths of some, *do-gooders* has become a derisive term. Perhaps those who use it suspect those who set out to do good either to be hypocrites with other motives or to believe themselves morally better. For Christians certainly, we do and seek to do good only because God is good and has called us, by grace alone, to share, and to share in, his goodness. Let our worship be service and our service worship.

+ Michael Cyprus & the Gulf

