

Installation Charge: Isaiah 43. 1 – 7; St John 15.5-17

Cyprus and the Gulf is a most unique Diocese. Now, at some level, I imagine that an argument could be made that all dioceses are unique, but we are unique in a way that a diocese in the UK or India or the USA or South Africa is certainly not.

The Diocese has the privilege of encompassing the biblical land of Cyprus, and the Gulf countries in which early Christianity took root, and where Islam was born. It is situated at a global crossroad where East meets West, and South meets North. This is perhaps best seen by considering that our neighbouring Anglican Dioceses are Jerusalem, Iran, Egypt, and Europe! At this busy spiritual and geopolitical crossroad, we offer migrants and pilgrims a meeting place with God and one another. We are a most unique and precious Diocese.

Tonight, I have the privilege and opportunity to deliver a *charge* to the Diocese. It perhaps needs saying that such a charge isn't what happens on your credit card, and hopefully it won't be what the Light Brigade did. A charge, in this sense, is an opportunity to share something of my vision and hopes for the Diocese, and to invite you as its clergy and people to be my "co-workers, working together"ⁱ to build up God's Church in Cyprus and the Gulf.

During my initial travels in the Diocese, I have been searching for a metaphor to describe it in all its uniqueness and diversity. What came to mind was the resonant image of a tent.

In the Bible, tents recall the pilgrim-journey of Abraham and Sarahⁱⁱ; the Exodus of God's people from Egypt; the tented tabernacle in the wildernessⁱⁱⁱ; and the incarnation as St John describes it: the Word who became flesh and pitched his tent among us^{iv}. And with all the people of God we understand ourselves to be earthly sojourners waiting for a permanent home when the tent of this body is destroyed^v.

The metaphor of a tent connects us with the culture and nomadic past of the people of the Middle East, and with our own experience as transient people. With the notable exception of Iraqi Anglicans, we are largely a diocese of, and a diocese for, migrants.

This large Anglican tent covering the crossroads of the world is held up and supported by our theology and polity; and its fabric is our worship and common life. Anglicanism is a Christian tradition that serves this context surprisingly well. We espouse a generous, welcoming, and moderate Christian orthodoxy; we are committed to being good neighbours and serving the common good of all; we are active partners in interfaith, ecumenical and ecological dialogue; and we have gained respect from governments in the region for our sound governance. We are also deeply connected to the wider Anglican family in our Province and in the worldwide Anglican Communion.

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Tents have guy ropes pegged into the ground. In our metaphor, the tent pegs might represent our personal and spiritual identity rooted elsewhere in the world. The guy ropes then become how this rootedness pulls on, influences, and shapes our Diocese.

We need, I believe, to recognise that being a multinational, multicultural, and multiracial diocese is a blessing and a strength. But holding this diversity together – especially over the vast geography of the diocese is a challenge. We will always face the risk that one guy rope of the tent will be pulled too hard towards a particular expression of Anglican Christianity, and that this will put the whole tent under tremendous strain.

The writer to the Colossians says of Christ, "He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together."^{vi} All things can hold together in Christ, including a diverse and dispersed diocese. We must just want this; and empowered by the Spirit of Christ seek its unity.

Our uniqueness, and I would go as far as to say our *calling* as a diocese is to hold and balance our differences and natural tensions. In so doing we are able to offer a uniquely Cyprus and the Gulf spiritual and physical tent under which people can gather to meet with God and with one another.

Now, this is not always an easy vocation. Sometimes it may feel like we are trying to put up a tent in a storm! But where, by God's grace, we get it right there is so much to give thanks for and celebrate. In countries where we are most often guests and a minority faith, migrant strangers become spiritual family, and we discover anew that when we pass through the overwhelming waters of life, and walk through the fires of migration, we are *precious* and *loved* by God, and that God is *with us*, and that our challenges will not overcome us.^{vii}

A tent needs one last basic item. And that is a groundsheet to insulate it against damp and cold. Without a groundsheet staying in a tent is a completely miserable experience – it would almost be better to have no tent. Sometimes our experience of the Church - whether at diocesan or church council or congregational level - can be so miserable and disillusioning that we wonder why we are choosing to stay in this "tent"! God does not inflict this misery on us – we do it to one another through our brokenness and sin.

Over the course of my ministry, I have seen much heartache stem from two basic sins of the Church.

The first is when we assume that God wants what we want. We have deep convictions and passions that we are prepared to "die in a ditch" over, and we uncritically believe that these ideas and feelings are inspired by God. We sin by failing to do the most

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basic work of discernment by using Scripture or the character of Jesus Christ as a yardstick to evaluate our thinking. And then we so often end up being driven by human insecurity, ego, and ambition into much heartache. Not our will, but thine be done, O Lord.^{viii}

In the recent Anglican Primates meeting the Pope declared, 'I very much like that expression from the Acts of the Apostles: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us".^{ix} This should be our orthopraxis: discerning the spirits^x and respectfully listening to one another. This is how we will remain in the true vine of Christ and bear much good fruit.^{xi}

The second basic sin of the Church is somehow forgetting the link between *belief and behaviour*. We use much pulpit time talking about love and neighbourliness – as we should – but we then treat people in callous, uncaring, disrespectful, and harmful ways! We do this to people outside the Church; but we also have a terrible reputation for "wounding our own soldiers". I have known of too many people who have left the Christian faith after what the Church has done to them: there are clergy who have experienced deep and unnecessary vocational injuries; laypeople whose talents and rich life-experiences are not recognised or respected; and just too many instances of sexual, psychological, financial, and spiritual abuse.

Can we make a new commitment, relying on the grace of God, to be a Diocese that is better than this? To be spiritually discerning; and as St Paul enjoined his protégé Timothy, to set an example "in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity?"^{xii} With such a spiritual groundsheet, life in this diocesan tent can only be safer, more inspiring, and more Christlike.

Our Diocesan "tent" will be 50 years old in 2026. There is little doubt that it will need some re-patching and perhaps re-pitching if it is to be fit-for-purpose for the next 50 years. Such renewal and reform are being underpinned by the Constitutional Review Committee initiated by Synod. Constitutional review might sound dull, but it is how the wind of the Holy Spirit^{xiii} will blow the cobwebs away, and shape and enable our diocese to best continue the mission of Christ. I ask for your prayers for this process, and also for that most understated of spiritual fruit – patience^{xiv} – as we undertake this process "decently and in order"^{xv}.

May God bless and encourage us in his service in this Anglican tent at the crossroads of the world; and inspired by the words of the prophet Isaiah, may the site of our tent be enlarged, and the curtains of our habitations stretched out; let us not hold back, but lengthen our cords and strengthen our stakes.^{xvi} Amen.

ⁱ 1 Corinthians 3.9

ⁱⁱ Genesis 12.1ff

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iii Exodus 25–31 and 35–40.

iv John 1.14

v 2 Corinthians 5.1

vi Colossians 1.17

vii Isaiah 43.1-4

viii Luke 22.42

ix Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Assembly of Primates of the Anglican Communion. 2 May 2024

x 1 Corinthians 12.10

xi John 15.5ff

xii 1 Timothy 4.12

xiii John 3.8

xiv Galatians 5.22

xv 1 Corinthians 14.40

xvi Isaiah 54.2