

## General Synod Service Sermon

**Preacher: The Rt Revd Dr Ian W Ellis (Bishop of Clogher)**

**Embargo Until Delivery • Check Against Delivery**

*Jesus said: 'So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.' John 16.22*

There is a television programme which I find myself watching and being absorbed by – it's called *The Repair Shop*. The basic premise of the programme is that individuals bring for repair much loved household or personal items which have long lost their earlier beauty or function, but which have great sentimental value. The repair shop has skilled craftsmen and women whose speciality is restoration.

The fascination is to see the patience and skill of the repairers who find a way to bring something which looks a lost cause back to vibrant life again. They bring hope to a situation of despair and loss. After a few weeks the owners return, and the repaired item which has been brought back to life is revealed.

The impact upon the owner is remarkable – because so much of their life or the remembrance of someone else associated with the item is wrapped up in it – they almost always shed tears of joy to see the much-loved piece restored the way they used to remember it.

*The Repair Shop* is a great illustration of hope at work – what seems a hopeless cause of an old decrepit thing decayed by time and misuse – can be lovingly restored to awaken memories and bring joy.

I wonder if this is a good paradigm for the work of the Church – to be the kind of place where the weary can find refreshment, the despairing find hope, the hurting can find healing, the penitent find new beginnings. You and I are workers in God's repair-shop called to use our patience, skills, and loving care to help any who come near the church door. And the impact we may have to bring hope and healing is immeasurable through the grace of God.

In the reading this morning from St John, Jesus gives his disciples that cherished and firm assurance of hope – 'So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you'. He was speaking just before his crucifixion and pointing to a time in a little while when despite what was to happen, they would see him

## **General Synod Service Sermon**

**Preacher: The Rt Revd Dr Ian W Ellis (Bishop of Clogher)**

**Embargo Until Delivery • Check Against Delivery**

again and their pain of loss will be turned to joy. And that hope is held out for all time, to all people and all creation.

The Church is called to proclaim that Jesus Christ brings to this world hope of salvation, inspiration for living, the possibility of new beginnings and purpose in times of despair. It's exactly the message of comfort we need to speak out and live out today – no matter how bleak things seem we have God's gift of hope found in the resurrection of Jesus his Son.

One New Testament theologian has recently written that all of us are in some way or another, coping with being overwhelmed in life and we need to find a shape to our living.

Many people live with extraordinary challenges which seem overwhelming – perhaps caring for a dementia sufferer, supporting a child with a disability, dealing with unexpected life events. Conversely, some things may overwhelm us in a good way – we can be overawed by outstanding beauty, generosity, and gratitude. More often though we can be overcome by world news, job insecurity, pain, exhaustion. Many of us also have more trivial overwhelmings. I find I am overwhelmed when that pack of papers for General Synod arrives, and I suffer extreme information overload!

Jesus declares for all who are feeling overwhelmed – 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest' – that is his gift of hope. However, to help us bring shape to our living takes another divine gift – the gift of wisdom to grasp hope and take it in and allow it to infuse our hearts.

The Bible reveals Wisdom as being an eternal characteristic of God present from the creation of the world. The apostles came to believe that the wisdom of God was incarnate in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the one to whom we look to see the eternal word, wisdom and power.

Today at the outset of our General Synod we meet to pursue God's shaping of our church life. This morning by prayer, and gathering around the Lord's table, we seek his wisdom and grace to help us in our discussions and decisions. Meeting in Synod is our corporate opportunity to bring to God's repair shop, matters in our church and society which we need help with to make better, to strengthen, and renew.

## **General Synod Service Sermon**

**Preacher: The Rt Revd Dr Ian W Ellis (Bishop of Clogher)**

**Embargo Until Delivery • Check Against Delivery**

We seek that wisdom gift as we shape our governance, our structures, finances, ministry, or safeguarding. We seek wisdom's insight also to repair broken relationships – pastoral or otherwise, and to make room for acceptance and better understanding wherever there is difference. We need that gift of faith to believe that things can be made better and that nothing is beyond his power to change.

Churches like many organisations can have blind-spots. In recent years General Synod has highlighted important subjects and issues we needed help to grasp. Last year the young people of Mullingar alerted us to the challenge of climate change and responsible stewardship of creation. The topic of good mental health in church life developed by the Mind Matters programme is another area drawn to our attention, and we look forward to a presentation tomorrow to further inform and challenge us. Equally we acknowledge that we live in a very diverse society and look to the presentation by the Primate's Diversity Group to help challenge our attitudes and priorities in church life.

Let us then listen out in these next few days in our speeches and debates look for that wisdom of God and being open to it leading us perhaps unexpectedly to better and renewed understandings.

So to conclude: As we gather together from so many different contexts and experiences, may we be open to hearing wisdom's call to bring a shape to our living– as we seek to cope with what can overwhelm us in our personal, community or church life.

And returning to the thought of God's repair shop, may we be useful in his hands to bring hope to many. May the Lord revive our spirit, cleanse, and restore us and that the hope we hold, may be seen in the service of love to transform a broken world.

*'So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.'*