

Diocesan Synod 15 March 2025

Presidential Address – The Right Reverend Tim Thornton

1 Timothy 6: 11 – 17

¹¹ But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made^[a] the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. ¹⁶ It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen. ¹⁷ As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

Make the good confession - This text is the one that I discovered when praying as a 16 year old about whether God may be calling me to test my sense of vocation to ordained ministry. It speaks to me of the challenge I face every day of my life. That challenge is that I do not dismiss the calling God has given me, that I do not hide myself from God as I constantly and stupidly try and do, that I have a voice and should use it, that I yes, get things wrong, but that the word ‘confession’ does not mean that I should keep saying sorry (like Ronnie Corbet – not now Timothy) but rather than I confess the faith that is in me and which I know to be the truth about the living God who is Father Son and Holy Spirit.

Thank you for continuing to bear witness to Christ and to work together for the mission and ministry of the Church in this diocese.

There is much that is good that is happening, for example reports of good numbers of people attending services over the Christmas period. In our meeting today we are hearing good news stories from local churches and seeing very good examples of the church responding to the challenge of today for example in the work that Tim will tell us about in the environment and Eco Church.

We will hear later a report from the recent session of General Synod but you will not be surprised that because of the recent issues, not least the resignation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the discussions around Living in Love and Faith have been elongated still further. What we do know is that there will be a need for Diocesan Synod to be consulted later this year and I know plans are already being discussed to ensure this happens in the best way possible.

We know that the Church of England is going through a difficult time and I am sure many of you will have been asked questions by friends or colleagues in the recent months about what is happening. I know that this diocese has a particular link with Archbishop Justin and you will want to keep him and Caroline in your prayers of course.

The Makin report is shocking to read for many reasons. I would also commend to you the Scolding report which relates to the issues around the Soul Survivor church and movement. There are too many such lessons learnt reports which seem to demonstrate that we are not very good at learning lessons. We must listen to the victims and survivors of abuse and we must pay attention to the voices that will

always be saying challenging things to us, make us feel uncomfortable but we must listen and then we must act on what we hear.

But I want to say one more thing as we prepare to move on and encourage you to have your voice heard in this synod about the current situation.

I have had an odd time in the church, I have worked in a number of different dioceses over the last 45 years and even spent some time in a different province of the Anglican communion – Wales! I have had the opportunity to sit in on a number of senior teams and to take part in leading some of them and of course I latterly spent time in Lambeth working alongside the Archbishop. I do not suggest that I know more or my experience is in any way of more value than anyone else's but I do want to say that I think the church will make a very big mistake if the only or primary lesson it learns from recent events is in the area of safeguarding.

I believe and have done for some time and have gone on public record in saying this that the major issue is accountability and I think there are some clear and obvious ways in which we can and should become more accountable and by we I mean firstly bishops and archbishops, then clergy generally and also church officers and lay people generally.

I do not want to control the world although of course I am a control freak I recognise. Rather I want to set people free to make the good confession of the faith. In order to be set free as so many walks of life demonstrate to us it is better to have a proper system of accountability in order both to protect and to liberate people.

Now is not the time and I am not the person in this diocese to go into great details on this matter but I did want to raise it. We do need to have the confidence to confess the faith that we profess. In order to do that I believe we need to learn the lesson about interdependence and far too many clergy and church leaders if you scratch the surface prefer to be independent rather than recognised their interdependence which surely as those who worship the Triune God is our calling and our mission.

Thank you for all you are doing, I take it a privilege to be among you even for a short time. I look forward to hearing the conversations this morning and to learning more about the body of Christ in this place and to being encouraged by you and my prayer is that we will all be encouraged and challenged, recognising we need each other and we are accountable as we continue to respond to our calling.