

¹⁴ Sing, O daughter of Zion;
shout aloud, O Israel!
Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
¹⁵ For the Lord will remove his hand of judgment
and will disperse the armies of your enemy.
And the Lord himself, the King of Israel,
will live among you!
At last your troubles will be over,
and you will never again fear disaster.
¹⁶ On that day the announcement to Jerusalem will be,
“Cheer up, Zion! Don’t be afraid!
¹⁷ For the Lord your God is living among you.
He is a mighty savior.
He will take delight in you with gladness.
With his love, he will calm all your fears.
He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.”

Zephaniah 3: 14-17 (NLT)

Sung:

I love You, Lord
For Your mercy never fails me
All my days, I've been held in Your hands
From the moment that I wake up
Until I lay my head
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

And all my life You have been faithful
And all my life You have been so, so good
With every breath that I am able
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God

(Songwriters: Jason David Ingram, Brian Johnson, Edmond Martin Cash, Benjamin David Fielding, Jenn Johnson.)

On this first opportunity to address you as President of Synod, I want to speak a little about the call to come and join you here in Coventry. I also want to share some thoughts about the coming months and the opportunities that lie before us all.

Back in January 2024, I was practicing at the piano. I don't really play, but I can 'note bash' to assist with singing (which may be a familiar experience for some of you) I'm a string player and a singer. But that day, I was captured by that song "*All my life you have been faithful*." I was preparing for the College of Bishops' worship band—a new initiative. Up until then, I might have described worship at those gatherings as a little bit 'stiff'. But with a creative new chaplain who brought life and energy, we sang that song. And all I can say is, it wouldn't leave me alone for months.

Fast forward to the call from the Archbishop's Appointments Advisor, to request my papers

for Coventry. I'm not sure, I said, (It's no secret that I was extremely happy in Sheffield). I'll read the profile and pray about it. "It's a good fit, I think," he said.

And so...on my morning run, in the car, walking through the supermarket, going about ministry as Bishop of Doncaster... *All my life, you have been faithful.* "Okay Lord," I said, "I will test this call, and we shall see."

The song continued—by now, slightly annoyingly— as did the CNC process for Coventry.

Fast forward to 4th of November 2024. I was waiting in the green room at Blue Coat School. The gospel choir was in fine voice, singing the opening song of the day. Just as the 10:00 AM announcement took place—perfectly timed—the school announced they were going to sing their brand-new school song: *All my life, you have been faithful.*

The rest of the day unfolded as a whirlwind of introductions. Many of your lovely faces made up what felt like a cast of thousands on that very special, memorable day. Smiling faces, good food, inspiring visits to community, church, and missional activities across Coventry—all culminating in evening worship at Alcester Minster, a beautiful setting.

I had imagined a more traditional finish—perhaps something from the Book of Common Prayer. But what unfolded was a beautifully crafted evening act of worship. And just before the final blessing, the minister stood up and said, "We've been learning a new song recently, one we started a few months ago. We're going to sing it now: *I will sing of the goodness of God.*"

I tell you this story because I believe it speaks of God singing over us—repeatedly, faithfully, creatively, and relentlessly. That hasn't always been my experience, at least not in such literal ways. But I can only testify to what is true. Since arriving: I am indeed encountering the goodness of God among us—in all kinds of places, among all kinds of people, and in all sorts of ways.

I want to thank you especially for the warmth of your welcome and I want to thank you again for all that you represent, and for your hard work—lay and ordained—through a time of considerable uncertainty. I know it's not all about bishops; I have no illusions. But as one colleague recently reminded me, "I've had five bishops in two years, and it's been a lot." I'm not sure what the term for that is—I'll leave it to your imagination!

Since arriving, I've been in both urban and rural contexts. On Sundays, I've been in Stoke Aldermoor, St Mark's Coventry, Bidford, Oldberrow, the Cathedral on several occasions—including a couple of ordinations—and most recently in Claverdon Village Church, where biblical rain fell upon us. And I'll be visiting many more places in the coming months.

That's just the Sundays. I've been all over during the week too. I've seen almost every ordinand and curate in the vocations process. I'm beginning to meet members of the central team and am trying to drop into Church House and the Cathedral whenever the diary permits.

My vision is for one team across this beautiful diocese, dispersed into different contexts. I've spent time with most of the area deans and am gradually meeting the precious individuals we call 'lay' people.

You may know that I serve as the Episcopal Lead Bishop for Lay Ministries—something that is very close to my heart. I co-chair the Lay Ministries Advisory Group with Paula Gooder, which is one of the great joys of my life. I've also been really encouraged by how the national strategy for lay ministries is beginning to take off. It's taken us a while, hasn't it? But we are beginning to make really good progress. I'm genuinely keen to see that continue—not just here, but across the Church of England. As I step more fully into this role, I'm becoming increasingly aware of both the joys and the challenges we face. And some of those challenges are considerable.

I want to say a little about the months ahead, as this will frame how I approach my time with you. Right now, I would describe myself as being in "listening mode"—and yes, in "singing mode" too—but mostly listening. I'm absorbing your stories, getting a feel for the geography and context of our diocese, and, most importantly, hearing a wide variety of voices, including those of children and young people.

In the autumn, I will move into what I'm calling the "immersion phase." During this time, I'll spend a full day visiting every deanery and the cathedral, as I work to piece together a broader, strategic picture of our life together.

Then, in Advent, I will be inviting you—and others across the diocese—to join me in a time of waiting and watching. Waiting on the Lord to speak to us. Watching for the signs of his Kingdom among us. Listening for the songs he sings over us during this season.

There will be more details to come, of course. And as the new year begins, I'll invite you to share your reflections. Together, we will seek to discern what God has been saying to us. I hope that you, too, will bear witness to what you've been hearing—so that by mid-spring and beyond, we can walk forward together into the season that God is calling us into for the years ahead.

This period will also bring significant appointments, including the process of discerning the next Bishop of Warwick. I want to be clear that I'm not beginning that process just yet. It's a big decision—and I am not doing it now though it challenges my own capacity, because I want to know you, and the wider diocese, more deeply before making such a significant choice.

So, the shape of the coming year is this: listening, immersing, waiting, watching, witnessing, and walking forward together.

Now, it's important to name the wider context. As neat as this process may sound, it will be challenged—within the diocese, because this is a time of transition. And transition brings uncertainty, which can naturally make people feel anxious. I understand that. My prayer is that we can hold one another in love—prayerfully, kindly, and especially in areas of disagreement.

Which brings to speak of the wider Church of England and the uncertainties there too, all of which will be reflected among us. What is true "out there" will also be true "in here." As I get to know you, it is my hope that I can serve you well—bringing calm, undefended leadership to our common life. Leadership that is just. That is kind. That is safe. And I will need your help in doing that. I'll need your patience. I'll need your grace—just as you will

need mine.

Alongside this, we face disturbing times in our geopolitical life, climate emergency, and violence and war on an unprecedented scale. Coventry has a prophetic voice to offer into this space, but we can only do that as God guide us into the future—the future he desires for each of us—as we play our part.

And now, I'm here, God has been singing a new song.

*God, I look to you. I won't be overwhelmed.
Give me vision to see things like you do.
God, I look to you—
You're where my help comes from.
Give me wisdom. You know, just what to do.
And I will love you Lord my strength
And I will love you Lord my shield
and I will love you Lord my rock,
forever.
All my days,
I will love you, Lord.*

So synod, as we move into the coming months and especially as you will I hope, join with me in waiting and watching and witnessing (when we come to that moment), to the new songs God is singing over us. My prayer is that you will know, as I will too, the lord delighting in us and renewing us for the task of sharing his story of love in this precious Diocese of Coventry, and especially in all the places that you serve for this day and for many years to come.

Thank you.