

**Sermon at the Collation and Installation of Dean and Precentor
On the Feast of St Asaph, 5 May 2018**

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**“Gwnewch beth bynnag a ddywed wrthyhch –
Do whatever he tells you” Jn 2:5**

Yn enw Tad, ar Mab, ar Ybsryd Glan.

“Gwnewch beth bynnag a ddywed wrthyhch – Do whatever he tells you.”

These words from our second reading speak to the heart of the Christian faith: that we listen – learn to listen – to whatever Jesus says, and let it shape my life, your life, our lives.

Bishop Joanna, since you issued the invitation to come here ... for which, so far at least, Thank You! (And may I also extend thanks far and wide: to all who have been part of my journey here, to all who are part of today, and especially to my husband Peter, for letting himself be dragged to the opposite corner of Wales: like him, I grew up in the Diocese of St Asaph, and was ordained in his cathedral, so it is a particularly lovely coincidence to be Collated and Installed here, on his feast day).

Anyway, since your invitation, Bishop Joanna, I've been pondering what it might mean to 'Do whatever Christ says' for the life and ministry of Deans and of Cathedrals. I'll begin with Cathedrals, often called mother churches.

Mothering is something you know far more about than I do, since I have no biological children. I'm also conscious that mother images for church, like father images for God, can often become tangled up with personal experience of fallible human parenting. So I turned for inspiration to the Bible's most famous mother, Mary – similarly complex in Christian tradition, where the risks are that we make too much of her, or too little.

I found our second Scripture reading a good place to start: Do whatever he tells you, says the one who said Yes, 'May it be to me according to your word.'

The wedding at Cana is John's account of Jesus' first sign, that God's kingdom comes with the invitation to joyful celebration of humanity at one with – reconciled to – God. By doing what he tells us, we discover the unexpectedly overflowing bounty of Christ's complete delight in our lives.

What might this mean for the life of a Cathedral – and, more specifically, of this Cathedral, in this place, at this time? What might it mean to listen and respond to Jesus Christ in this way, for myself and with others – those who are part of the family of this parish, those who come regularly, those who visit consciously as pilgrims, or by chance as tourists? What are we called to be and become, in and for St Davids the city, in and for St Davids the Diocese, in and for Wales and beyond, as we share this glorious good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ?

You'll be glad to know I'm not going to try answering all this today! Indeed, I've a lot of listening and learning to do. But here are some initial reflections.

The word Cathedral derives from being the place of the bishop's seat – so Cathedrals' ministries, at least in part, reflect and echo the calling of bishops in being by God's grace a sign and focus of all God's gifts to, and through, God's One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church.

Thus, insofar as Bishops are to teach, Cathedrals should be places of teaching, proclaiming, learning, the faith of the Apostles, expressed in lives of holiness: places where we strive to discover how the eternal truths of God's creating and redeeming love find expression in the complexities of our own times – gauging that fine line between Holy Spirit-led appropriate enculturation and unacceptable seductions by the spirit of the age.

Cathedrals are where bishops gather the community of the faithful, presiding over the Eucharist. Here the Diocesan family comes together, both physically and spiritually – for the Diocese is the 'local church' in Anglican and wider historic understanding. Whatever your parish or ministry area, this also is your church. Be welcome, be at home! Pray for us, and with us; and know we pray for you. The particular rhythm of prayer and worship followed here must show that the Diocesan family is a community of prayer.

I give particular thanks to God for all those who, over past centuries, have made this a place soaked in prayer – one of the 'thin' places of the world, where we can feel the compassion of God's loving touch meeting us in all our cares and pains; and find encouragement, courage and strength for whatever life brings.

And while we have Dean and Chapter, with particular roles and responsibilities, every priest of the diocese is also in some ways a priest of the cathedral. Lay or ordained, all our lives are bound up together, and I am delighted that this is a Cathedral that still observes the practices of Canons coming into residence – bringing families, and parish visits.

Cathedrals can reflect the calling of Bishops to be a sign of the unity of God's Church, its oneness and its catholicity – linking Christian communities of every time and place. To Mary, standing at the foot of the cross with the beloved disciple, Jesus says 'Behold your son, behold your mother' – today he still creates the family of God beyond flesh and blood.

One definition of being part of a family is that when you turn up on their doorstep, they have to let you in! Here we don't merely let you in, we welcome you with open arms – and indeed, send out the invitation to one and all, near and far – and we know, people come in their thousands, hundreds of thousands.

And of course this should be especially true of Tyddewi, the house of David, who served God in holiness long before the churches of East and West split and who is honoured in both; long before the divisions of the Reformation, or later rifts in Wales. These involved my forebear Daniel Rowland, the curate of Llangeitho – all of which is the subject of another sermon, for another day. But like the Lord he served, Dewi welcomes us all here,

brothers and sisters of Christ together, of whatever tradition. Mae Dewi, a thŷ Dewi, yn cynnig croeso i bawb; yn cynnig lletygarwch i bawb.

Christian unity is very dear to my heart, as I've been involved in international Anglican ecumenism, with everyone from the Pentecostal World Fellowship to the Orthodox families of Churches, almost all my ordained life – bringing to bear lessons from the previous 15 years spent as a British diplomat. Hence my choice of the first reading, and the centrality of reconciliation. Indeed, the necessity of Christ-shaped, Spirit-enabled reconciliation reaches into every area of our lives: spiritual or secular, private or public, personal or political. Diplomacy teaches that true reconciliation is required for just and lasting peace – for if it isn't just, it won't last! But that's a sermon for another day ...

The holy hospitality at the heart of Cathedral life brings me to the role of Deans. This title derives from the monastic rule of St Benedict, a contemporary of St David, and means one in charge of a group of ten. Well, Welsh cathedrals have modest staffing – and thank you, to the whole team. But let me pay also tribute also to the wardens and the innumerable ranks of volunteers! If the Dean is guest-master, then all share in the ministry of welcome. Benedict himself wrote, 'Let all guests who arrive be welcomed as Christ, for He is going to say "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me" (Mk 25:35). Proper honour must be shown, especially to those who share our faith and to pilgrims' (Rule, Chapter 53).

Looking ahead, welcoming pilgrims is going to be an ever greater part of our lives in the coming years, when, insofar as historians are able to agree, we have various 900 year anniversaries of David. Long known in Wales, Ireland, Brittany and beyond as a holy man, it seems he was formally recognised as a saint by Pope Callixtus II in 1120; and in 1123 the Pope decreed two pilgrimages here equalled one to Rome.

There's a lot before us, but should we be daunted? As St Paul always says, by no means! – and in our first reading he reminds us that the love of Christ urges us on; and it is together with Christ that we are called to work. All we have to do is listen, and do what he tells us.

So, here we are, in this wonderful building, of which Jesus himself is the cornerstone, the foundation – and if all who come here build our lives on him, our efforts will not be in vain, as our Psalm said.

Indeed, perhaps each of us should always come in pilgrim mode – arriving, metaphorically, on our knees, in prayer, in humility, ready and open to listen and learn, and to be changed. And we should certainly come expecting to receive a foretaste of the heavenly banquet; even a glimpse, a vision, of heaven, of God's glory revealed in Jesus. When we are, as St David put it, faithful in the little things; when, as Mary says, we do whatever Jesus tells us, then the everyday becomes sacred. The water of the world becomes the wine of the kingdom of heaven.

Lord Jesus Christ, by your grace, may it be so for me, may it be so for us all. Amen

Readings: John 2:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2