



Eglwys Gadeiriol Tyddewi

Croesawu ymwelwyr fel pererinion

St Davids Cathedral

Welcoming visitors as pilgrims



Oddi wrth Y Deon: Y Tra Pharchedig Dr Sarah Rowland Jones LVO OBE

From the Dean: The Very Revd Dr Sarah Rowland Jones LVO OBE

Dean's Address at Chapter Eucharist The Feast of St James, 26 July 2018

I've not yet discovered why Chapter Day is linked to the Feast of St James, but a first glance at the set readings is not altogether comforting!

We, the leadership of this place, have a warning of the dangers of seeking leadership positions; the promise – even threat – of a bitter cup to be drunk; and the example of James' beheading. In the first lesson, Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch, learns that all that the Lord has built up will come crashing down, and he will face the same disaster as all flesh. Receiving his life as the spoils of war seems scant consolation!

But perhaps we should be realistic, and name the difficulties of our task. We know the demographic and financial constrictions facing the Church in Wales, and our Diocese – at least our Bishop is honest about their role in restructuring, and about how we must feel free to mourn the passing of old, comfortable, well-loved, ways which are no longer sustainable. The Chapter must also make changes, whether we like it or not, to move the oversight, governance and management of the Cathedral towards current best practice. We must respond to the proposals of the Cathedrals Review Group and the obligations that come with Charity Commission registration.

Yet ensuring our policies and practices have firm institutional footings is a genuine task of true servanthood, for the church, and its mission and ministry, for today and for tomorrow. While we must always beware inappropriate syncretism with what the Collect calls the 'false attractions of the world', there can be much from which to learn. For example, integrity (let's say righteousness), transparency (truth setting us free), accountability (the common life of the whole body of Christ), are godly foundations on which to build for the future.

It can be uncomfortable embracing change, however necessary or even welcome. In this, the set Psalm encourages me – as it has at key points in my life. Here let me take a short biographical detour, for those of you who don't know me.

- I was baptised as a baby, and later, in Welshpool, sent to Sunday School, though we rarely attended church as a family.
- Faith came alive through the Christian Union established at High School.
- It was stretched and grew through undergraduate Christian experience at University, which included charismatic experience – and meeting Joanna!
- 15 years with the FCO included overseas postings where I learnt to appreciate, and find engagement with God through, whatever form of Anglicanism was on offer.
- Accepted for ordination training through my home Diocese of St Asaph, I studied in Nottingham, during which I followed the Full 30 Day Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.
- While curate in Wrexham, I was soon sucked into the international Anglican world, and met my future husband, a widowed South African black dean/bishop.
- Three weeks before our wedding, he was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and died 13 months later. It was the most spiritually profound time of my life – the happiest year to that point, even in the trauma and loss. We tasted and saw that God is good.

This Psalm came up in the lectionary towards the end of Justus' life. It's not those who weep who find joy, but those who, in their tears and grieving, nonetheless persist in sowing seeds, in working for the ultimate emergence of a future harvest. Then, that meant Justus' children and I should not be afraid to plan for life beyond his death, and even embrace it with hope.

For us now, it is both the godly invitation to be honest if change stirs up negative feelings, and the promise of a hope-filled future, even if there is the hard work of sowing to be done.

This is such a remarkable place of holy faithfulness and centuries of prayer, that I do believe that we can go forward in expectation of God's blessing – especially if we do indeed, as the Collect prayed, listen deeply to the calling of Jesus Christ, so that we may forsake the false attractions of the world, and respond by following wherever he leads us.

So, today our prayer is that he may lead us in this new Chapter of life, as faithful servants of this Cathedral, and faithful servants of its Servant King.

Collect: Merciful God, whose holy apostle Saint James, leaving his father and all that he had, was obedient to the calling of your Son Jesus Christ and followed him even to death: help us, forsaking the false attractions of the world, to be ready at all times to answer your call without delay; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jeremiah 45; Acts 11:27-12:2; Ps 126; Mt 20:20-28