

**‘How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!’
A Sermon for Chapter Day, Thursday 29 July 2021
Given at St Davids Cathedral by the Dean**

‘How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul has a desire and longing to enter the courts of the Lord ...’ (Ps 84:1) What words could be more appropriate as Chapter meet, here in the Cathedral Quire, robed and in our stalls, for the first time since before the pandemic – it is a joy to be her with you, with Cathedral staff and friends.

Chapter Day always brings a weighty agenda, reflecting our responsibilities for the care of this place, its worship, ministry and mission. Such spiritual objectives require a lot of supportive work – just as in our first reading, we heard of the great list of practical instructions Moses had to follow for the setting up of the tabernacle. And why? So that the glory of the Lord would come to fill it.

It is our prayer that the glory of the Lord will fill this place also. And while that glory led the ancient Hebrew people from place to place, our prayer is that those hundreds of thousands who come travelling here will find this the place of living faith, the place of the living God.

And our task, in all the different ways before us, is to be doorkeepers who throw the doors as wide open as possible – so that (the Psalmist again), those who go through the barren valleys of life may find here a spring, the early rains of blessing, the living water of Jesus Christ.

How shall we do this? I like the image from our gospel reading – may we indeed be granted the holy wisdom to be like the scribes trained for the kingdom of heaven, who bring out of our treasure what is new and what is old. First, the importance of the old: in many ways, the lockdowns and other ramifications of the pandemic has helped us to see with greater clarity what is the essence of tradition, which we must uphold and re-express, while sitting more lightly to what we now recognise as habit – though some of that is good to keep too!

And there’s the new. I’ll not easily forget how Leigh and I were talking in February, and realised that we each had an incomplete part of a jigsaw, which together formed what we felt was a God-gifted vision for what became our online pilgrimage of ‘Gorffwys, Myfyrio, Derbyn – Rest, Reflect, Receive’ offered online to parish and Cathedral communities, the Diocese and beyond. We set the Lenten journey to the foot of the cross and empty tomb alongside the medieval pilgrims’ journey from their last staging post in to the Cathedral, and also our journey through Covid-19. We spoke of resting from the exhaustion of life’s journey, and getting ourselves cleaned up; and of reflecting on all we’ve been learning along the way. And we said we should be ready to receive whatever the crucified and risen Christ has for us, as we go forwards.

And, as you will have seen in my long report to Chapter of all that has happened since we last met just after Easter, we have been receiving so, so much – so many areas of Cathedral activity have taken on new life, and grown, or found fresh momentum, or are developing in other ways.

It’s more than we hoped or imagined. And it is all to this end: to support and promote our primary calling of worship and witness and service. To praise God, to proclaim the coming of the kingdom, to declare the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and action.

So however weighed down our agenda is with practical matters, let us not get so caught up in the work of the Lord (in effect saying 'OK, Lord, I get the picture, now stand back and let me get on with implementing it!') that we lose sight of the Lord of the work, the Lord who calls us into an ever more intimate relationship of love.

Therefore, as we meet today, may we find with the Psalmist (84:11-12) that the Lord God is both sun and shield; who will give grace and glory. Maye the Lord withhold no good thing from us as we seek to walk with him in integrity.

O Lord God of hosts, bless us, and bless others through us, as we put our trust in you.
Amen

[This an edited version of the Dean's address]

Exodus 40:16-21,34-48

Psalm 84

Matthew 13:47-53