



The Church of England  
Diocese of Ely

The Bishop of Ely

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Dear Friends,

*The disciples on the road to Emmaus after the crucifixion told the stranger who had joined them on the road what they had expected, which had not turned out as they had hoped. This could also be true of us: we had hoped that the Church would continue in its current shape, but this cannot be...*

*the Kingdom of God is growing in our midst. We have confidence in the God who transforms lives and brings hope to individuals and communities. Strategies and policies will follow from our vision of God. God is in charge...*

I wrote this in my conversation with the Diocese in *Imagining the Future* in 2012. It is just as relevant now as we begin to emerge from the Covid19 lock down. We are cautiously and carefully returning to public worship in and outside our church buildings. We do not know what 'normal' is going to be or feel like going forward.

Our Lectionary during recent weeks has given us Jesus' parables of the Kingdom. Matthew 13 records Jesus using images of the Kingdom growing in our midst: even as good and bad grow together, we can have confidence that God is in charge; as seed takes root in good soil, it brings forth grain that yields in different amounts – the fruit is good, even where the yield differs; the leaven works in the dough. Some of the ways God is at work remain imperceptible, but the Kingdom is at hand, at work, among us. God whose Kingdom is breaking in remains sovereign, and still loves us, even when things are very difficult and painful. We are such treasure to God that He sent and gave His only Son to us and for us. Such love is the pearl beyond price, revealed and paid for on the Cross.

We have a vision to be people fully alive, drawing on Jesus' promise in John 10:10, and the insight of Irenaeus that "The glory of God is a human person fully alive." Less often quoted is the second half of his saying, that "The life of humanity exists in the vision of God."

In the letter I wrote last month to the diocesan synod in lieu of a presidential address, and which was shared much more widely, I said that in the midst of all that has changed, some things have not changed: the promises of God have not changed; our calling and identity as God's beloved children have not changed; the resurrection hope of transformation has not changed.

This gives us the confidence to imagine a future which will not be the one we hoped or expected. This is an invitation to start dreaming out loud together about what God's church fully alive should be and how God's world transformed could be. We have seen what happens in creation when we

withdraw meekly and let nature breathe; we have seen the power of a cry for justice being taken up around the world; we have seen mercy and loving-kindness shown in ways great and small.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus says 'blessed ARE they'. God's blessings are not postponed. We are blessed now, even in the midst of all that we have faced and are facing. At the beginning of Matthew 5, Jesus sat down on the mountain with the crowd and the disciples and taught them that all that God's promises are true now – blessings are not postponed until the future; we are God's children now. The Beatitudes point us to the reality of that fullness of life held out in Christ, to the reality of God's Kingdom that is at hand.

And so I invite you, over the coming weeks, to reflect on the Beatitudes, and on some questions around them – on your own, in your ministry teams, PCCs, Bible study and nurture groups, in the sermon slot, with the children and young people's groups. Let us dwell in Jesus' words, and let them dwell in us – listening as he teaches us, reminding us that blessings are now. I provide some questions or prompts for reflection on a separate sheet; but you don't have to answer all the questions, or you might be led in different ways with them as you reflect.

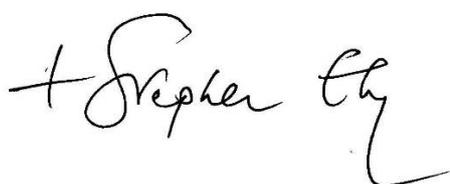
We pray to be generous and visible people of Jesus Christ, living in the confidence that blessings are not postponed and the God who is the source of all life and blessing still loves us, still calls us, and is faithful.

It may be that we are being called by God to be even more generous with less, trusting in the abundance of God's provision and blessing for us. We cannot be generous from a place of austerity where the poor always suffer more; but we see in poor communities, here and around the world, that we can be generous in shared poverty, modesty and humility. I have seen this in the Diocese here, and even more so in poor parts of the Anglican Communion, not least in our sister dioceses of Kigali and Vellore.

The pandemic has not changed the Church; but it has accelerated changes that we should be making anyway, to be a simpler and humbler, where our resources are focused on the local in our deaneries and parishes, in our schools and chaplaincies. We need to raise up the next generation of leaders in mission and grow them past us. Bishop Dagmar and I will be reflecting together in the coming weeks how we see the signs of the Kingdom and what conversation we have with all of you about the future, not unlike the pattern of 2012 when I came and spoke with your chapters and synods about *Imagining the Future*. I would be very glad to hear from you early in the autumn as particular reflections on the Beatitudes and my questions come to you.

Please make sure that as well as reflecting you take some sort of break – even if it is at home – over the summer. I know that everyone is tired and much has been demanded over recent months. Again, I give thanks to God for you and thank you for all the ways in which you have risen to the challenges of the pandemic.

With love in Him,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Chy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.