

Friday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2019

Dear Friends,

*'Prayer not despair, this is how the people of God respond in times like this.'* Those simple words have been turning over in my mind since they were gently expressed to me yesterday morning in the briefest of conversations after early morning Communion in the Minster. I had ventured a short reflection on the Gospel reading and its relevance to the political crisis we are facing, before turning to the intercessions.

*'Prayer not despair'*. The sentiment might sound simplistic, but for me deep wisdom was carried in the voice, as well as the eyes and heart of someone who in their long ministry has never turned away from people or situations of despair. Yet they have also learned the power of bold and persistent intercession. I know I need our retired clergy not only because of the vital role they play in many of our most hard-pressed parishes, but also because of their spiritual perspective like the sight of a climber higher up the mountain.

It has been a most strange first full week of September, filled as always with the nervous-excitement of new beginnings for students starting or returning to school, as well as the usual gear-change for churches accelerating into the autumn – hope you are not feeling too exhausted already! Then each day events unfolding in Parliament have contained so much tension and hostility that, whatever your political viewpoint, you cannot fail to be deeply disturbed by the situation we are in. *'Prayer not despair, is how the people of God respond in times like this.'*

On Wednesday some of us gathered with a large congregation at St Mary's in the Lace Market to give thanks for the life of Canon John Bentham, as well as to share in the sorrow and heartbreak felt by his family and close friends. In one of the hymns we sang,

*You are wisdom unimagined,  
Who can understand your ways?  
Reigning high above the Heavens,  
Reaching down in endless grace.  
You're the lifter of the lowly,  
Compassionate and kind;  
You surround and You uphold me  
And your promises are my delight.*

*Your plans are still to prosper  
You have not forgotten us,  
You're with us in the fire and the flood.  
You're faithful for ever  
Perfect in love, You are sovereign over us.*

This is why '*Prayer not despair*' is no slogan for people hiding from the harsh realities of a broken world or the pain of grief, but the determined courage of those who will not stop believing that, as Lauren Daigle puts it, '*God is still rolling stones!*'

So whatever this autumn may hold for each of us and our nation, I would gently urge us to make '*Prayer not despair*' our strategy for mission and personal growth. Where you can, create fresh ways for people to come together to pray for our nation – that whatever else emerges out of this time of uncertainty we will plead for nothing less than a revival of faith in the living God.

This all chimes well with the year's **Diocesan Conference focused on 'Abounding and Abiding'** being held 30 Sept-2 Oct. With such brilliant speakers in Dr Jane Williams and Professor Tom Greggs please encourage people to sign up while there are still some spaces. But before then we have an amazing weekend ahead with the **oneLIFE mission** led by the Archbishop of York, 12-15 September. There are now over 400 events planned, 60 nurture courses ready to start within two weeks of the mission, and of course thousands of people still to invite along – all the details are on the website. Let's pray for many new seeds of faith to be planted in every place.

In our life as a diocese please keep in your prayers appointments we are seeking to make to a number of parishes. With seven wonderful new incumbents to be licensed in the early autumn we also give thanks for answered prayers. I would especially value your prayers for the appointment of new a Diocesan Chief Executive and for Nigel as he prepares to move on to a strategic role in education. The position will be advertised next week with information through the website. I also want to express sincere gratitude to Canon Nigel Coates who will soon be retiring with a final Sunday on 22 September after 14 years the Minster. Serving first as Canon Pastor, then more recently as Canon Chancellor while focusing on restoring the Chapter House and the inspirational Leaves of Southwell, Nigel has also served on two occasions with distinction as Acting Dean. We welcome the new Canon Precentor, Richard Frith, being installed on Sunday.

For all of us seeking to move forward in God's purposes, I conclude by offering you this *Prayer of Commitment* by A W Tozer, a tireless encourager of bold, intercessory prayer. It is a daring prayer. It cuts against the grain of our instinct to self-preservation.

It reminds us to pray for all our politicians and their advisers with humility and compassion. It is a prayer to the 'God on whom we have set all our hope' (2 Cor 1:10).

*I come to you today, O Lord,  
To give up my rights,  
To lay down my life,  
To offer my future,  
To give my devotion, my skills, my energies.  
I shall not waste time  
Deploring my weaknesses  
Nor my unfittedness for the work.  
I acknowledge your choice with my life  
To make Christ attractive and intelligible  
To those around me.*

*I come to you for spiritual preparation.  
Put your hand upon me,  
Anoint me with the oil of the One  
With Good News.*

*Save me from compromise,  
Heal my soul from small ambitions,  
Deliver me from the itch to always be right,  
Save me from wasting time.*

*I accept hard work, I ask for no easy place,  
Help me not to judge others who walk a smoother path.  
Show me those things that diminish spiritual power in a soul.*

*I now consecrate my days to you,  
Make your will more precious than anybody or anything.  
Fill me with your power  
And when at the end of life's journey  
I see you face to face  
May I hear those undeserving words:  
"Well done my good and faithful servant"  
I ask this not for myself  
But for the glory of the name of your Son. Amen!*

With every blessing and gratitude as ever for your partnership in the gospel,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, starting with a small cross symbol followed by the name 'Paul'. The signature is written in dark ink and has a long, sweeping underline.

The Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham, The Rt Revd Paul Williams