

The Perils of the Present, The Victory of Hope

Text as prepared for delivery by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the 8th Trumpet of the Global South Conference 2021 on Thursday 14th October 2021

It is such a joy to be able to speak to you today. I only wish that I could be with you in person, but I rejoice that I will see so many at the Lambeth Conference next year – including Archbishop Justin Badi. Thank you for your leadership in the Global South and your commitment to the global church.

Next year we will be praying and talking together about how to be God's Church for God's world – a 21st century Church for a 21st Century world. In this world, we face real, and grave perils. The church always is, and always has been, surrounded by dangers and by enemies. Hardly surprising – we follow a crucified saviour, we are part of a church that arises out of persecution and yet ultimately – through the immense power of God, transforms it.

Nor, historically, is it surprising that some of the dangers we face come from the inside of the church instead of the outside. We have form when it comes to disagreements and division, as broken sinners striving to live in the light of God's holiness.

The book of the Lambeth conference is 1 Peter. It has so much to speak to our lives, our church, our entire world today. 1 Peter warns – beware of the 'roaring lion looking for someone to devour.' Several years ago I visited Kenya. Many of you will know I have such a deep love for Kenya, I first visited in my youth and have gone back whenever I can ever since. On this trip, I was listening to Archbishop Jackson. He told us a story from when he was a young man – only 13 or 14 – and a herder. On his first duty, guarding the flock at night, his friends told him that when a lion roared, it was preparing to charge. Of course, he spent the night terrified, but the joke by his friends was that lions are, of course, far more dangerous when they're silent. This means they are stalking their prey and preparing to pounce.

So for us in the church, some of the lions are very loud, and some of them are far more insidious. But we need to be on our guard against them all. And to guard against them, we need to know them, and name them. We can't guard against something we haven't identified. So, let's name them. There are four obvious ones:

Firstly, climate change. The threat that affects every single human being on the planet, if not as a current reality, then as a future certainty. It is already impacting on the lives and livelihoods of some of the most vulnerable people around the world. This issue will not go away – if it is not dealt with it will stop being a threat and become a fate. At COP26 next month, leaders will gather from all over the world. My prayer is that they will show leadership through their partnership, forging just, fair relationships that equip and empower the Global South to be drivers of environmental change.

Secondly, disease. Of course, our minds might immediately jump to Covid-19, but I'm also mindful of the many other diseases that cause so much suffering and death around the world – malaria, tuberculosis, ebola, HIV/AIDS. I rejoiced at the recent news of a vaccine for malaria – pray God it may swiftly save many million lives. Our global battle against Covid-19 has exposed the threat to all of humanity of our selfishness, of the illusion of self-sufficiency, the fallacy that it's possible or even desirable for some of us to thrive whilst leaving others behind.

Thirdly, persecution, which is so rife across our global Anglican family. Recently we remembered the 8th anniversary of the bombing in Peshawar, which killed 127 of our brothers and sisters. Many Global South countries will know well the fear of persecution. Let us name it fully and properly – in many places this persecution is from religious extremism, including from Islamist groups, from Hindu radicals and many others. In many places it is from governments, whether atheistic or religious. I dream of a day where Christians and people of all religions are able to practice – even celebrate – their faith, without fear of persecution, of death, of retaliation.

Related but not entirely the same is the threat of conflict and the reality of war, from within families and households to the level of civil war and international conflict. I have spent much of this year writing a book about reconciliation, which I hope will be published in early 2022. Violence, wherever it is found, disfigures and disregards the image of God in each of us.

Finally, I think of the divisions within our own church. Mark 3:25 – 'If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand'. That's what Jesus tells us. If we are inward looking, if we are more focussed on internal divisions and differences rather than displaying God's unity which transcends all the barriers we sinful humans want to put up around ourselves, then people will not know we are God's church and people will not see God's reconciling power in us. Jesus' last prayer was for unity. Division and separation are not biblical. They are not Godly. Disagreement is fine – even good and helpful. Difference and diversity are a blessing of the God who is limitless beyond our imagination. But it is how we deal with these differences and disagreements that mark us out as God's people.

1 Peter 5 describes 'your enemy, the devil'. Not 'your enemy, those who disagree with you'. Not 'your enemy, those who say nasty things behind our backs'. Not 'your enemy because they are of a different church or form of churchmanship'. It's 'your enemy, the devil'.

1 Peter's advice to the shepherds on the look out for the lions, is to 'cast all your anxiety' on God, who will always be big enough to handle it. So much of the anxiety which leads to our arguments and divisions in the Church comes from anxiety and fear. They in turn come from not casting our anxieties on Christ – he knows we are not able to handle it alone, and He does not ask us to! He stands with outstretched arms, waiting for us to bring our problems to him rather than take them out on each other.

These are the obvious perils that the church faces. Many of you will have first-hand experience of so many of them; you will know and understand them better than I. But I also

wanted to raise some of the less obvious ones, perils which perhaps fuel the threats I've talked about and have become the backdrop of the events we see playing out.

The renewal of imperialism, or its revival from places we thought it had died out. This shows itself through the way we are dealing with climate change, through health inequalities, our indifference in the Global North to the sufferings of the Global South in persecution, war and catastrophe. It includes policies on migration, and imposition of forms of thought, against the will of Global South countries, as a condition of receiving aid and support. These are grave examples of where we do not love our neighbour as ourselves, we have not truly seen all in the image of God, or treated everyone as fully equal under His eyes.

Secondly, ignorance. Ironically, the greatest era of communication in history - a time where I have the blessing of being able to speak to you via Zoom and hear from you via WhatsApp, from all over the world in real time – has also led to ever more ignorance. The spreading of misinformation, the polarising effect of algorithms that are designed to push different positions further apart and ensure that our own opinions are always reinforced but rarely challenged, means that we become more ignorant about those with whom we disagree. We fall into silos of people who think like us, who look like us, who have the same experiences and opinions as us. We've become less good at really listening to each other and loving one another.

And finally, connected from ignorance, I want to raise the fear of contamination by meeting with the wrong people. The worry about condemnation from those who are our friends and allies if we dare to cross the divides that separate us. Jesus met with so many people who were considered 'unclean', 'impure', 'improper'. He scandalised people with his relationships with lepers, adulterers, tax collectors - the poor, the reviled, the forgotten. His example and love for all shows that there is never any 'us and them' in His eyes – only us and God.

There is good news. There is *the* Good News! As the church, Christians have the answer and can offer the solution to these problems. Our answer is found in Colossians 3, particularly verse 11: 'In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!' In loving one another, we must treat one another equally. We must honour and respect one another. We must listen and walk with each other. We can show ourselves as a church which is actively supporting vaccine generosity, fair and just trade, respect for different views, even where we disagree, because we can hold firmly to the certain truth that we find in Christ Jesus.

Then we can be the light of the world – 1 Peter says our very purpose, our *raison d'être*, is to 'proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'. Where there is darkness - and there is deep darkness, sometimes out in the open for everyone to see, sometimes in forgotten and lonely corners of the world, sometimes in our own hearts – our calling is to shine the light of the Lord towards it, to bring it into the light. Our calling is to make holy disciples living in love under scripture.



We serve the one who raised Jesus from the dead. We follow the one who was accused of mixing with the wrong people. We worship the one who washed the feet of his own betrayer and called for his forgiveness. That is how we can know that perfect love casts out fear.

The reality, of course, is that all of us – including, probably especially, me – fall into these errors. Every one of us. We are sinners, and our only hope is in the forgiveness that comes from Christ and the power of the Spirit.

But I also know that the Anglican Communion has the potential to be one of the greatest forces in the entire world to deal with these threats, through preaching the Good News, living in holiness and loving our enemies. The whole context of 1 Peter is about the body of Christ, the temple in which each living stone is fitting together and supports the other, none of which are dispensable in the structure.

So my plea and my prayer today is that we seek to show the world and the global church what God in His grace has made possible; not through our agreement but through our love for one another in spite of our disagreement. In the way our Communion is structured and works we can demonstrate a genuinely hospitable, post-colonial church that takes seriously the unspeakable depths of the love of Christ for every human being, regardless of race, nation, identity and any other difference which pales in the light of the magnificent promise of God.