

Speech for Northern Mosaic Conference – 13th May at 10.30am

It really is a pleasure to be speaking at this inaugural Northern Mosaic Conference and a real thrill to have the Archbishop of York as my warmup act!

Why is Mosaic important?

Mosaic is a fledgling organisation; it is amazing to think we have only went public three months ago and so I am particularly thrilled that so many people across the church have already embraced and invested emotionally and spiritually in Mosaic. That, in of itself, states that Mosaic is seeking to engage with something that has specific traction within our present context and therefore is of importance and needs to be taken seriously. I have had so many conversations from people across the church wanting to learn more about Mosaic with many then asking how they can get involved.

If I look back to the beginning of 2020 Mosaic as an organisation wasn't even on the radar, we were all overwhelmed, responding to the start of the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown. Yet over the past year we have also had the publication of 'Living in Love and Faith', the Church of England's teaching resource on human sexuality and relationships and the 'Black Lives Matter' movement leading to the set-up of an Anti-Racism Taskforce by the House of Bishop's which in turn has recently published their report 'From Lament to Action'.

Both publications touch directly on people's very sense of self, their identity, their God given image. And yet this time last year we were also starting to see at close hand within our parishes and wider local communities the discriminatory outcomes of the Covid 19 virus,

especially with those living through socio-economic hardship and/or as part of the UKME community and/or as disabled and/or as the over 70s; each being particularly hit. The language of eugenics was never far from the surface.

The challenges of marginalised groups seeking access and agency within the Church of England were being particularly highlighted. Lockdown brought to the surface what has been present all along and the demand for some kind on concerted action was undeniable and that concerted action needed to relate to the specific dynamics and unique context of being Anglican, especially with General Synod elections on the horizon.

I wish to share how Mosaic engages specifically within the structures of the Church of England. First it is important to state that there is not one organisation called the Church of England - that is a misnomer. The Church of England is made up of 42 autonomous dioceses, each an entity in and of itself. This is why Mosaic seeks to have a convener in every diocese – a point of contact who is fully versed in the culture and context of their particular diocese. Our hope is that each convener will facilitate a diocesan mosaic group to campaign at parish, deanery and diocesan level enabling marginalised groups access and agency within the diocese, freed to fully participate as part of the Body of Christ.

We already have conveners in 30 of the 42 dioceses, though of course our aim is for every diocese to have a convener on the ground as soon as possible. Our prayer is that the conveners will also become a nationwide network of inclusion and participation, sharing experience and skills across the whole church. The Steering Group supports the conveners and organises bimonthly meetings where we can share ideas and offer mutual support with one another. The Steering Group also reports to our Patrons who are prophetic voices within the church,

many of whom hold senior leadership roles within the church. It is they who are charged with the role of critical friend, offering Mosaic their expertise, and speaking for Mosaic in ongoing national debates, within our National Church, on General Synod.

In Mosaic, we are blessed with our partner organisations and they have done and continue to do extraordinary work paving the way for the coming of God's Kingdom within their specific focus, whether it issue around human sexuality, disability, gender, race, traveller communities, the list goes on, but there has not been a specifically Anglican organisation through which they can gather and speak as one voice.

There is of course Inclusive Church, which is also, I'm pleased to say, a partner organisation, and of which I was a trustee and now am an ambassador. They do extraordinary and invaluable work, but they work across Christian denominations and are an educational charity not a campaigning charity.

We on the Steering Group are so grateful for the investment our Patrons, Conveners and Partner Organisations have made in Mosaic and our prayer is that through our partnership Mosaic will be known by our fruits, proclaiming Jesus' call *'that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.'*

Mosaic was formed to offer something pertinent, specific, and new. It is an organisation that seeks to engage specifically within the Church of England as it is, whilst also seeking to transform it from within. Mosaic acknowledges and appreciates the broad nature of the church, that the Church of England is broad in theology, ecclesiology and worship style, a Church that is both 'catholic and reformed.'

It is a church that therefore has a history of living within and holding great tension, often as we know at considerable cost to individuals, communities, and the institution itself. It is not easy being part of an institution that all too often washes its dirty linen in public, there are times when it is so painful, I wish I could hide away in shame, and yet I wouldn't have it any other way.

For being an ordained priest in the Church of England is a huge privilege. Amongst so many things I get to be alongside people at the defining moments of life, the occasional offices – hatch, match, and dispatch. I cannot count how many baptisms I have had the privilege to have celebrated. It is the occasional office that I genuinely enjoy the most because it so wonderfully expresses the defining gift of Christianity which is Grace.

I have always been drawn to the last sentence of the Common Worship Introduction at the beginning of the baptism liturgy. It goes as follows:

'In God we have a new dignity and God calls us to fullness of life'.

It is the inspiration for our Mosaic tagline,

'Campaigning for a Church of England where all find dignity and fullness of life'

Notice that this is a statement that comes out of our liturgy, written by the church, yes rooted in scripture, but it is a promise by the church to invest in the flourishing of the other. The statement does not exclude. We all have a new dignity and God calls us all to fullness of life. The Church is therefore investing in the flourishing of each and every one of us.

Mosaic seeks to hold the Church of England to account to its baptism promise and campaign alongside and offer support to individuals and specific groups who are marginalised and denied their God given dignity by the institution of the Church and where their flourishing as people made in the image and likeness of God is compromised.

We know that the Church we love has a history stretching right back, where people, because of their ethnicity, their gender, their sexuality, their neurodiversity, their economic status, their physical and educational disability, have not received from the church their God given dignity and have been denied their fullness of life.

We may have experienced this personally or we have reached out to those we see suffering great harm responding to the call beholden on each one of us to be a people of love, justice, and mercy. We are in the human flourishing business and the call to servant discipleship demands that we invest in the flourishing of the other. It is what builds loving dynamic community, which I believe is at the heart of the Trinity.

This though does not mean that we don't acknowledge the challenges of diversity. Mosaic is not just about championing and celebrating what we all share - our God given identity and image, each beloved by God - but also engaging with and holding together our differences, exploring how we can ultimately live well together within difference.

This is the great Anglican experiment. Can we model for ourselves and for the world a way of living together that is Kingdom focused, a way of living that focuses on the dignity and flourishing of the other? I really do not want to be in a church only with people who broadly agree with me. Neither do I think it is God's purpose that we all agree, for God is calling us into a far deeper relationship and profound relationship with him and therefore with each other. I want to be part

of a church where there are people who profoundly disagree with me and is a church of immeasurable love, justice and mercy.

This is the radical inclusion that Archbishop Justin challenged us with back in 2017. Radical, because Christ calls us to '*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. Do to others as you would have them do to you.*' Radical inclusion is hard and costly and for many it is a cross that is too heavy to bear.

When the steering group met for the first time in the Autumn of last year, I asked myself and them a simple question. 'Do we want the church to split?' Every single member of the steering committee responded No. And yet the direction of travel that the Church of England is presently on, especially in the area of human sexuality, is potentially heading directly towards a split.

The stakes are high, the lines in the sand have been clearly marked. We know the position and arguments of each side. The binary nature of our discourse calls out for winners and losers. And yet if we carry on our present path, the end of this particular story will have no winners and only losers. We will all lose.

So the challenge ahead is can we reframe the conversation and move away from the need for winners and losers? How can we step back from the edge, the abyss? How can we move beyond our lines in the sand, stand side by side in no-man's land and share with each other what the terrain looks like from there? If we are going all going to lose, is it possible to explore how we can lose well together?

Let us not forget that in secular terms it can be argued Jesus lost, he was crucified as a common criminal. The disciples fled. And yet we know on this Feast of the Ascension, bathed in the glow of the

resurrection, that God was following a completely different rule book to the one we were following and today we celebrate the culmination of the incarnation, that the human lived experience is fully part of the Trinity, that when we pray to God, we pray to God who intimately understands, is not distant from us but fully present. Maybe part of the Christian calling is to explore together how to lose well!

The House of Bishop's has responded to the call for a radical new inclusion by offering the Living in Love and Faith program, which came out of the Sharing Conversations program. Because each of our stories matter and we need to listen to the stories of those who make up our church. Mosaic seeks to celebrate and affirm our deeper calling of offering a way to be one through our diversity and difference, not in spite of it.

The paradox that I have discovered through the conversations I have had with those who profoundly disagree with me is that the Conservative needs the Liberal and the Liberal needs the Conservative, ironically if only to help each to define their own particular position and to avoid becoming complacent. Each challenges the other to better hold and articulate their theological position. We need each other. So, one important strand of Mosaic is to seek to facilitate safe, and I repeat that word, safe conversations with those who hold different and deeply held positions.

We want to listen to the stories of the other and discover the integrities of differing ways of engaging with Scripture. Mosaic does so from a place of confidence, confident in our identity in Christ with each one of us made in the image and likeness of God; confident in our campaign for full participation and the flourishing of all who have been and still are marginalised by the church; not ignoring our differences, but rather seeking safe, undefended conversations rooted and held in mutual respect and dignity. Mosaic extends the hand of friendship and

fellowship to all who seek to join that journey of exploration, firm in the knowledge that God loves and cherishes all the children of the world as one people made perfect in the Divine Image.

For, *'We are the Body of Christ. In the one spirit we were all baptised into one Body. Let us then pursue all that makes for peace and builds up our common life.'*

The Peace of the Ascended and Risen Christ be always with you.

Thank you for listening.

Questions

Within your own church and diocese who do you believe are excluded from full participation within the Body of Christ and how can Mosaic be a partner for change?

How can we reframe conversations around inclusion and diversity within our churches and dioceses so that we move away from the need for winners and losers?