

*The Diocesan Synod of St. Andrew's, Dunkeld & Dunblane
Via Zoom – March 6th 2021*

A novel experience for all of us – not Zoom, but an online Synod – was an enjoyable day of sharing and listening. Indeed – it was a gathered flock brought together from the far reaches of the Diocese which began with a most beautiful Eucharistic service (complete with Perth-based birdsong outside the Bishop's window). The whole idea of an outward-looking altar was symbolic of the day – a sacramental rooting and sending out was experienced in so many ways.

Bishop Ian spoke of the Prodigal as being one of those “mischievous little dramas to make us think” and he used this to explore the things which we often miss in familiar stories.

That prayer with which we are all so familiar, “Father of all, we give you thanks and praise that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home....” – filtered through the proceedings of the day with the holy embracing the practical in a sense of real hope for a future which might be different, but.... This theme of the return of the Prodigal was encouraged by the Bishop's question of “how do we imitate this foolish divine rejoicing in the life of the Church?”

Acutely aware of all of the issues and changes which face us as a Church, a country, a world; we were encouraged in the Bishop's Charge to continue to look outwards and be:

Humbler
Simpler
More generous
More Loving

Indeed, this was echoed throughout the day and voiced by differing people in ways distinct to their callings – including Brendan Grimley's, “what we provide goes to help others”, as a part of the financial review. This echoed in financial terms the whole purpose of the day and our missional orientation as a Diocese.

Pilgrimage was explored as a natural part of what might be possible as churches evolve to embrace a differing world, yet still maintain their distinctive nature which speaks to so many people. Nick Cooke and The Reverend Gennie Evans explored the concept of pilgrimage with the now extended ‘Season of Pilgrimage’, and a particular focus on St. Fillan's, Killin, as it begins a new chapter in its life as a pilgrim chapel. It should be noted – especially at this time

of dislocation – that St. Fillan is the patron saint of mental health – and therefore as relevant today as it ever was.

The Synod working party decided some time ago to use nominated facilitators in breakout rooms in order to best elicit streamlined feedback.

The Canon 4 (Election of Bishops) discussions showed a real love and care for the importance of the structures, the people who became subject to them, and the need for discernment throughout. This demonstrated a strong connection of Church and people which showed engagement on many levels.

Bubbles the dog and ‘hitting sticks’ accurately summed up the young people’s experience of an open and accepting Church which enabled them to grow as individuals in a collective faith. We were encouraged by them and The Reverend Canon Christine Fraser to consider how we might engage with young people in community as well as Church.

The outward-facing nature of the day was held in the reality of the Climate Change discussion which encouraged us to think about how to best address the 2030 commitment as individual charges, and a whole Church. The Reverend Elaine Garman compared this to climbing Ben Lawers – speaking of the passion and inspiration of our shared ambition. This was discussed in breakout rooms; with the request for a shared audit and hopes for plans of action which encouraged and inspired. The Reverend John Murdoch (Church of Scotland) was keen to pursue active links with the Diocese in order to make this as ecumenical, outward-looking and community-focussed as possible.

The sending out had a real sense of hope and possibility about it, reflecting the message of ‘looking forward’, and echoing the Bishop’s charge that, “God is leading us....to something new and beautifully different, yet at its heart the same.”