



FAITH, HOPE and LOVE

A Pastoral Letter to the Teulu Asaph from the Bishop
Ascension 2022

It is Saint Paul, writing to the earliest Christian community at Corinth, who identifies these three things (Faith, Hope and Love) as belonging together and lasting forever. (1Cor 13.13). We've chosen them as the focus of our diocesan life, and they are being used in an increasing number of contexts. Most of all, I hope that you can identify with them and adopt them, and see them as a real opportunity and challenge for your own Christian discipleship and for the life of your Church.

Faith calls us to a closer walk with God; Hope invites us to be bearers of news that excites and liberates; Love in action, the greatest of the three, is the one that evidences our commitment to the other two.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, we should not imagine him as passing into the skies, but rather moving from the playing board of earthly history with its tight geographical corners and constraints of height, depth and length, and into the richer reality of eternity outside time and space which we refer to as the realm of God. It is recorded by the evangelists that his physical resurrection body transcended physicality – the disciples narrated that he could appear and disappear at will, and that his features were not always recognisable. Rather, for the New Testament, it is his disciples who are mandated to take on the role of his Body, the limbs through which God will now work his will for salvation and healing in the world. This means that the Church has a purpose and a mission, for if Jesus in his earthly life was the incarnate sign of a God who wills life, and life in all its abundance, for all his creation, then the Church inherits this mandate as a mandate for change, for renewal and for the cultivation of justice and peace for all. "As the Father sent me, so I send you." (John 20.21)

I was challenged by a book of Christian poetry many many years ago, written by a poet called Steve Turner. I still find myself quoting from his poetry, and the sharp perception enshrined in his writing. One poem which he wrote was called "How to Hide Jesus", and it began with the lines:

There are people after Jesus.
They have seen the signs.
Quick, let's hide him.

It's a challenge to the way in which we live out Church, and yes – sometimes we do hide Jesus; under the blanket of familiar routines, or personal preferences, cloaked by impenetrable language or frosty reception. Instead, as a Church we reveal Jesus when we exhibit Faith, Hope and Love - precisely these qualities – which is why it is good to put them at the heart of our diocesan mission.

One of the ways in which I'd like to encourage you to engage with the diocesan focus in the coming weeks and months is by engaging in the new diocesan course on Faith, Hope and Love, which has been produced by a team led by the Archdeacons and our Communications Officer, Karen Maurice. The course will be launched on Ascension Day in the Cathedral, and should be available for use in all the Mission Areas.

It works through video and discussion, and is designed to help us to reflect on our own experience of discipleship, and our vocation as a Church. As we rebuild and reshape our common life in a new chapter of life, after Covid lockdown, let us renew our commitment to follow Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, and to grow in Faith, bring Hope, and demonstrate Love.

