

Looking Backwards and Forwards

Earlier this year we celebrated the 11th anniversary of Bishop Donald's arrival as our bishop. It was good to give thanks for his inspiring and visionary leadership and especially his commitment to the growth of every Church.

Ascension Day this month will be the 10th anniversary of my own consecration as one of your bishops in Westminster Abbey and St Peter's Day next month will mark 35 years since my ordination in Southwark Cathedral. Again, it has been good to look back over the countless ways in which I have been enriched by the family of God's people in Peterborough diocese. For example, the folk from Corby and Rushden who helped bring my faith alive as a teenager, wonderful mission training in Northampton as a curate, refreshing retreats at Ecton House and Launde Abbey, a faithful colleague whose father had been Vicar of Oakham and a memorable residential workshop at the Cathedral led by Canon (now Archbishop of York) Stephen Cottrell.

It's good to look back and celebrate. During lockdown I have learnt to value a way of praying in which each evening I review the day by asking the question; "Where has God been in my life today?" it's a great question, sometimes challenging, sometimes encouraging, often surprising. It has really helped me in daily seeking to walk with Jesus.

Dag Hammarskjold, the second Secretary General of the United Nations, famously once said: For all that has been, Thank You. For all that is to come, Yes!"

Looking forward to a post-lockdown world and church where it's too early to

say how much will have changed and how much will remain the same, I have been looking back to a book which inspired me 35 years ago. "*I heard the Owl call my name*" by Margaret Craven tells the story of a terminally ill young priest Mark Brian, with less than 3 years to live, who is sent to serve the remote Tsawataineuk village of Kingcome in the wilds of British Columbia, Canada, because it is where his bishop would have wished to go if he were young again in similar circumstances.

At first Mark fails to understand and makes little connection with the community, but gradually he learns to listen, to walk alongside and share people's lives, serving them in a Christ-like way, remembering that Jesus came and walked alongside all of us. The young priest and the village are both transformed. It's a beautiful description of the kind of "humbler, simpler, bolder Church" of which Archbishop Stephen has recently spoken.

May God bless and guide us as we seek to listen to our communities, walk alongside them and renew the lives of our Churches in the coming months.

With my thanks, prayers and best wishes,

+John
Bishop of Brixworth



+ A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a flourish.