

Response to the Bishop's Charge at the 136th Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton

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Thank you to Bishop David for the Charge to the Synod for this 136th Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton. My name is Lionel Hayter, I'm from the Parish of St. Andrew's and I am honoured to give the formal response to the Bishop's Charge.

I think the Bishop's theme of "Love" is aptly chosen for the world today. In this fast-paced age of technology, improvement, and ambition, love is often tossed aside for the sake of advancement. But love *is* taking a risk. Love is stepping outside of our comfort zone to greet a stranger in church. Love is attending a bake sale at church to show the young people who put it on that that they are welcome, that they are wanted, and that they are loved. Love is sharing a word of encouragement to a co-worker or even to a stranger at the grocery store. Yes, Love is a risk.

There is a song called "The Voice of Truth" which has always been a favorite of mine, I would like to share one of the verses with you:

*"Oh, what I would do to have
The kind of faith it takes to climb out of this boat I'm in
Onto the crashing waves
To step out of my comfort zone
Into the realm of the unknown where Jesus is
And He's holding out his hand*

*But the waves are calling out my name and they laugh at me
Reminding me of all the times I've tried before and failed
The waves they keep on telling me
Time and time again, 'Boy, you'll never win'*

*But the voice of truth tells me a different story
And the voice of truth says, 'Do not be afraid!'
And the voice of truth says, 'This is for My glory'
Out of all the voices calling out to me
I will choose to listen and believe the voice of truth"*

Yes, loving is a risk. It is a risk to say a kind word to a stranger. It is a risk to start up a bible study. It is a risk to invite someone you know to come to that bible study. But God calls us to take that risk, to love as He loved us. To step out of our comfort zone into the realm of the unknown. As C. S. Lewis said: "To love at all is to be vulnerable". But the good thing is that we aren't doing it alone. Not only do we have each other in all of this. Not only do we have our fellow Christians. We have Jesus Himself. And Jesus says

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” [Matthew 11:28-30]

The book “Surprise the World” goes hand in hand with the Bishop’s Charge of loving through mission. It is tempting to think that routines will rob our faith of its vitality but this is not true. We must be very careful that we do not replace the routines and habits that *surprise* the world with habits that *mimic* the world. We must expand upon our strength of rituals, use the Sunday morning service as a recharging service, as a diving board to propel ourselves into the world to show God’s love to all.

We are not to be “of this world” we are meant to be different, to buck the “norms” of society and go against the flow of the world. In a world dedicated to being the most efficient, the fastest, the richest, we are meant to surprise the world, to slow down, to treat people as God’s children and worthy of our love and God’s love and to put love above all riches and power and worldly glory.

We as Anglicans must be refreshed, but refreshed by mission, refreshed by love, refreshed by the winds of God. As the beloved hymn “I Feel the Winds of God Today” says,

*I feel the winds of God today;
Today my sail I lift,
Though heavy oft with drenching spray
And torn with many a rift;
If hope but light the water’s crest,
And Christ my bark will use,
I’ll seek the seas at his behest,
And brave another cruise.*

And, my friends, there is hope lighting the water’s crest. There is hope in each and every one of us here. There is hope in our home churches no matter how big or small, there is always hope so long as two or three are gathered in prayer there is hope. We, as Anglicans, as Christians, have the potential here to do something great. In a world with such darkness and despair daily filling our newspapers, and with so much noise from everyday life, we need God, we need love, the world needs love.

Have you ever been in a room that is pitch black? Perhaps the middle of stormy night and the power is out. Have you ever lit a match in that room? How bright that one little flame seems amidst the darkness. The darker the room is, the brighter the flame appears.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” [John 1:5]

Let us be that flame in this world of darkness. Let us step out onto the crashing waves and keep our eyes upon Jesus and keep our ears trained for the voice of truth. It all starts with feeling the winds of God, of being still and silent in prayer. Of listening for the *BELLS*.

Let us pray.

Heavenly father, thank you for this synod. Thank you for your church. We pray that you will help us take the risk of love. Be with each one of us as we go back to our home parishes to think and pray about what we have heard here today. Help us to BLESS, encourage us to form deeper connections with people through EATING together and spending time with our neighbours, help us to create space in our days to LISTEN. Help us to create space in our lives to LEARN about You, immerse ourselves in You. Help us to mirror God's love in every aspect of our lives. Lead us on your mission to the world and help us to make that first step towards showing your love to the world not only in our churches but in our communities as well. Stand with us and give us strength and courage to love and let us always remember that all we do, we do for your glory.

For yours is the kingdom the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.