

Last year one of my dreams came true I had the chance to play cricket here at Grace Road and I was so excited following in the footsteps of some of my heroes David Gower, Stuart Broad and my favourite Virat Kohli who batted right here behind me. I went into bat and to my shame the bowler got me out in the first over. I was teased mercilessly by my friends and colleagues and the news quickly got back home where my daughter dared to suggest that I quit playing altogether!

The story that did not travel so fast and so far was that on my first ball I ever bowled here at Grace Road I bowled out Katie Winterton the captain of the Leicestershire Women's Cricket Team. I will forever relish that moment. But it seems to me no one else noticed. Isn't it interesting bad news, as I learned that day, spreads fast good news makes its way more slowly.

Yet my friends we are bearers of the Gospel of the Good News and we cannot share it if you do not dwell in it. Our mind seems drawn towards the downsides we are often fixated on the negatives far more firmly and far more longer than we consider our blessings.

So first and foremost I want to express my sincere and genuine gratitude for all the ways in which people are seeking the Kingdom of God across the life of our diocese wherever I've been to recently whether at a school or a care home, in the heart of the city or on a farm, I have seen and I have heard of God present and active. This I believe is the story of the local and the global church. That God is, God Is not just in the spectacular but in the fabric of the everyday. In times of exile we read in scriptures God remains present. Beyond the feelings and experiences of a particular moment.

I want to share this as an encouragement to you. Firstly because of the importance of holding on to what is good and truthful when so much in our life as a church and as a nation feels heavy. As a bishop I have a particularly blessed vantage point in which I get to see people serving God in all kinds of contexts and in so many different ways. I share this with you secondly because I know how much and how easily the urgent can crowd out this significant, the business of our days and worries keeping our head above the waters can prevent us from seeing the greater story and the bigger picture of which we are part of.

But alongside the encouragement I also want to raise with you a question - how can we cultivate a desire for a church that is collectively and collaboratively shaped, rather than being made in our own individualistic personal image? I'm thinking here of lay leaders who have shared with me are feeling overlooked or underappreciated because they are not ordained clergy. I'm thinking of priests who have described nervousness about these Shaped By God Together conversations because of the entrenched attachments to "the way we do things around here." I'm thinking of the labels which we attach to one another, the hard lines which we draw between us and them. I'm thinking of the disparity between the racial and ethnic makeup of our population and that of our churches and synods which points to the barriers in our outreach our inclusion and our vocations. I believe wholeheartedly in the riches of our global church and how it can bless each of our worshipping communities whether their context appears monocultural or highly diverse. Intercultural approaches and racial justice are a hugely important part I believe of what it means to be Shaped By God Together.

This learning, shaping, sharing and listening is not always easy or comfortable and it certainly is not quick. The changes we want to see and the ways in which we want to change ask of us a "long obedience in the same direction" as Eugene Peterson put it. So I hope we can continue to inspire encourage and champion one another as we journey together. It is a joy to shepherd you as we work together in what God has in store for us. Grace, peace, hope and love to you my sisters and brothers here from Grace Road one of my favourite places in Leicestershire.