

## Synod Sermon

The Synod sermon was delivered by Bishop A J Dain on 15 July 1966.

### **Text: The Epistle to the Hebrews, Chapter 10, verses 22-24.**

In this passage, we find three injunctions which I would lift out for the sake of emphasis -

In verse 22; Let us draw near,  
In verse 23; Let us hold fast,  
In verse 24; Let us consider one another.

We have been called together this day to discharge a solemn obligation and responsibility, for which I trust we all share a sense of personal inadequacy. We meet at a time of international tension, when good men disagree on what is the right course of action. We meet at a time of spiritual declension, when some of our Church leaders are raising questions and doubts about the very fundamentals of our Christian faith. We meet at a time when our own Diocese faces many and complex problems of administration, of changing parochial patterns, of the wise stewardship of its resources, but above all else, of the spiritual challenge of our day and generation.

We meet specifically to discern the mind of Almighty God in the election of a new Archbishop, an overseer who will tend the flock and feed the Church of God.

At such a time, I would bring to your remembrance this three-fold exhortation of the writer of the Epistle - Let us consider one another. Here, in fact, is a call to steadfastness in faith, in hope and in love. These particular verses summarize the appeal of the whole Epistle. They are based, through the writer's use of the word "therefore" in verse 19, on the doctrinal teaching already given, about the efficacy of Christ's one sacrifice and His continuing ministry as our great High Priest at the Father's right hand.

Here we find first and foremost a call to enter into the realized presence of God, in confident, appropriating faith. Next, we find an exhortation to be steadfast in the confession of our Christian hope and, finally, we discover an appeal to be active towards all fellow Christians in love, fellowship and mutual encouragement.

This brief, threefold exhortation is subsequently enlarged in the three following chapters, which emphasize in turn the same three themes, the exercise of faith in Chapter XI; the patience of hope in Chapter XII; and the work of love in Chapter XIII.

Is it not possible that in these verses we may discover not only a general admonition for the church and for the believer of every age, but also, a peculiarly relevant word for our own hearts at this hour, as we face our particular task in this special session of Synod.

What, may I ask, is our greatest need at this moment, corporately and individually - it is wisdom? The wisdom that cometh down from above that is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. There is no doubt that we stand in need of such wisdom, but how is this wisdom to be received? "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask in faith, without wavering."

Surely our first need is therefore to draw near to our Great High Priest, in worship, and with petition. Soon we shall hear again the gracious words of invitation - "Draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort."

Let us indeed draw near - as we approach our solemn responsibility, we earnestly desire God's presence in our midst. We yearn that He should draw near. May we remind ourselves of the words of James: "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." There is a primary responsibility laid upon us to draw near to God. Our passage

throws further light on this exhortation to draw near. We must draw near with a true heart - "in sincerity of heart," says the New English Bible - with no ulterior motive, with no desire for personal gain, but with a single eye to the will of God and the glory of God.

We must further draw near, in full assurance of faith - that is, with absolute confidence in the perfection of Christ's sacrificial work upon the Cross, by virtue of which alone we can draw near and find access to the Father's presence. We must, however, also draw near with "our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." "Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord?" said the Psalmist - "he that hath clean hands and a pure heart." So may we draw near.

Our second injunction is that, having drawn near with faith, we should hold fast the confession of our hope (not the confession of our faith, as the AV incorrectly translated the clause). This was a call to steadfastness in the face of many and subtle temptations to abandon their Christian profession. The simplicity and spirituality of the Christian faith gave rise, and still gives rise, to much criticism; with the attendant temptation to them to drift back to the outward attractions of Judaism. We are today, still advised from some quarters, to make the Gospel more attractive to the man in the street, to remove the offence of the Cross.

We commenced with a plea for a renewed devotion, that we should draw near to God, but such a devotion must be closely linked with a steadfast adherence to the profession of our Christian hope. There is much to which we, as a Diocese, and to which we, as individuals, must, in this day and generation, hold fast. We must guard against an untheological devotion, but we must equally guard against an unspiritual doctrinal prejudice. We must hold fast to the confession of our hope, and that without wavering, but we have a powerful and persuasive encouragement to Christian fidelity, for "He is faithful that promised." We are not left to our own resources of strength or wisdom. The efficacy of the promises of God depend upon the faithfulness of God, who gives them, and "He is faithful that promised."

Our third injunction is somewhat unusual in this context, and yet it is closely related to our drawing near and to our holding fast. Perhaps I may be permitted to suggest that it has a particular and peculiar relevance to every member of Synod at this time.

Let us draw near; let us hold fast; and let us consider one another, to provoke unto love.

The third exhortation urges us immediately to turn our gaze away from ourselves, to one another, that we might provoke one another to love and to good works. There was a danger that these Hebrew Christians were pre-occupied with their own individual salvation, and they needed to be reminded that they belonged to the body of Christ. As fellow members of that body, they had mutual responsibilities to all other members.

How easy it is for us, when we are "holding fast the confession of our hope," or our own particular interpretation of that confession; to provoke unto anger. Is there any one of us who is guiltless at this point? The writer, fully aware of the frailties of human nature, has bidden us to hold fast our confession, but to do it in the context of "drawing near to God" on the one hand and "provoking one another to love" on the other hand.

What a difference it would make, in our coming Synod debate if this principle could be adopted; if, in the proper exchange of comment and assessment, we could consider one another and provoke unto love.

Here, then, is a threefold exhortation for us to take to heart: let us first draw near; let us then hold fast; and then, at all times in these coming days, let us consider one another, to provoke unto love good works.

At this moment we are all gathered here to draw near to feed upon our Risen Lord, to find grace and strength and humility and wisdom for the task ahead. May God grant that, as we gather together, around His table, demonstrating the unity of His Body, we may begin to have in increasing measure that divine activity of His blessed Spirit in our midst. That, like the Church at Antioch, as we minister to the Lord, we may hear the voice of the Spirit saying, "Separate me - this man - for the work whereunto I have called him."

As I close, may I, however, remind you that our responsibility will not end when we have elected our leader. We may, no doubt, we do, have our individual preference today. When elected, our new Archbishop will be the chief pastor of all. I doubt if any one of us can assess the burden of responsibility, of loneliness and of the care of all the churches committed to his charge.

We jealously guard the right to elect our chief pastor - do we as jealously guard and honour the responsibility to support him with our love, our loyalty and our prayers. Did we fail our last Archbishop in this respect? I trust that, God helping us, we may not fail the one of God's choosing, who will serve us in the years that lie ahead.

The choice of Matthias to join the apostles was followed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The choice of the deacons to assist in the administration of the early church was followed by the Word of God

increasing and the number of the disciples multiplying. The setting apart of Barnabas and Saul was followed by a new dynamic outreach of the Gospel throughout Asia. May Almighty God grant that the selection of our new leader may be accompanied by all these three manifestations of divine blessing upon this, our church, our land, and the world around us.