

Moderator's Speech at end of the General Assembly

Right Reverend

As we come to the end of what I believe has been a very significant week in the life of our Church it is good for a few moments to stop and recognise what has happened.

After decades of talking about the need for change but repeatedly pulling away from making the necessary changes, together, this week, we have united to approve :-

- the work of the Special Commission
- the Radical Action Plan
- and the report of the General Trustees on buildings

That is hugely significant.

Why did we make the changes when other GAs have pulled back?

Not because we were better or finer people, but maybe, in God's mercy, because of the both the prompting of God's Spirit and the prayers of God's people.

On a more basic level many realised that this might be our last chance, and I think because the pain of not changing was greater than the pain of changing.

But be under no illusions there is still pain.

The changes proposed and agreed, if implemented fully and in the spirit we agreed, will change our church in very significant ways and part of that change will involve loss.

We too often talk using spiritual metaphors of death and resurrection but make no mistake the death is real.

In the days, months and years ahead there will be hurt

- for individuals
- for the loss of cherished ways of doing things that have blessed us and been a blessing
- for a world that now has to be consigned to the past

While we hope that at the end there is resurrection there will be moments when we wonder if we will ever get there.

Christian love demands that we understand that and that we reach out in prayer and love and practical support for those for whom the final word in their story may

seem to them, at this stage in their story not to be resurrection but death.

I want to say this. My wife Ruth often says to the teenagers we worked with for years: "Doing the right thing does not always mean it feels right" but you must still do the right thing.

I believe God in his grace has united us to make important decisions together during this last week. However deciding to change is not the same as making the change, although it is a vital and necessary first step.

Machiavelli-a 16th century Italian politician and diplomat not often quoted in GA once wrote:

"There is nothing more difficult to carry out nothing more doubtful of success not more dangerous to handle than to institute a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all who profit by the old order and only lukewarm defenders in all who would profit by the new order. This lukewarmness arises partly from fear of their adversaries who have the law in their favour and partly from the incredulity of humankind who do not truly believe in anything new until they have had actual experience of it"

We have made an important first step but we are not there yet.

We need to pray for the Trustees who have been appointed today and to whom we have entrusted an enormous task. We need to pray that the changes agreed do not die the death of a thousand cuts or find themselves blocked by endless delays by those reluctant to give up ways which in good Cof S jargon "will see them out."

We need to be advocates and change makers for the road we have agreed to travel, not passive spectators. We need to be willing to pay the price ourselves. Like Jesus, having made our decision, there comes us time when we must set our face towards Jerusalem never forgetting that we go to the cross in the spirit of the cross.

And there is more. For even if we courageously follow through and make all the necessary changes we have agreed that in and of itself will not bring about the necessary revival and renewal we long for.

That is why alongside and through all the decisions we have made we have returned daily to the call of Jesus to discipleship "Follow me."

That is why we have supported the call to prayer "Thy Kingdom come"

Structural change, must be accompanied by personal renewal and active discipleship

Finally, we must continue to explore creative ways of being the church at a local level, and in partnership with others embracing the mixed economy of renewing

traditional church and developing fresh expressions of church.

When the three strands of personal renewal, creative ways of being church and structural change are joined together then, who knows, that if God be gracious and merciful to us.

He may visit us with his blessing and ensure that he still has a purpose for our beloved Church in the years ahead.

So we pray earnestly believing it is all of God and we work tirelessly believing he has called us to be co-workers with him and the desire is that all will be for good and for his glory.

That is the task that lies ahead and one that starts next week.