

# Sermon for the Installation Service

## 8<sup>th</sup> Bishop of Liverpool



***Jesus, may your name be first and last in all we say and do; and draw us to your Father in the power of the Spirit. Bring justice to victory. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.***

So there's this table.

It's a simple table but it's well made, because it was made by a carpenter. The guy who made it is a poor man, but he's generous. He offers a place at the table to anyone who wants to sit and eat. This is a table that started in one place but now it can stretch down every street, and it can go into every home, if people want to sit there.

It's a table for meeting. It's a table for talking around. It's a table for laughing. Most of all it's a table for eating. It's a level table. Maybe it's not a round table. Maybe it's a square table, so that people can look directly at one another as they sit there. Can look each other in the eye as they sit there, beside the poor man who made it. But it's not a high table. You don't have to qualify to sit there. It's for anyone. And the poor man sits there, and wherever people sit, he sits beside them. You can sit there too, with the poor man, and look across the table, at people you like and at people you don't like, at people who agree with you and at people who disagree with you.

Sometimes it's a table for thumping. Sometimes it's a table for signing treaties and for making peace. Always the poor man sits beside you.

Most of all it's a table for eating. You can't eat alone at this table. You can't buy a meal at this table. You can't buy a ticket to sit here. Anyone can sit here. It's a table like a table at a wedding. You sit with guests you never knew, and you find out about them, and they become your friends. And the table is spread with a beautiful fair white linen cloth and if you come here, like any pilgrim coming into a new house, they will clothe you in the most beautiful clothes and they will make you welcome.

And if you eat the food served here you will never be hungry again. Because the poor man offers the food at this table. And the poor man will serve you, and the poor man's hands are wounded when he serves you, because the food came at a price, and he paid the price.

The poor man's name is Jesus, who though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor so that through his poverty we might become rich. And if you sit at his table he will feed you and he will ask you to feed others; he will serve you and he will ask you to serve others; he will love you and he will ask you to love others.

I'm a Churchwarden's son and a cradle Christian, and I threw it all away in the late 1960s and early 70s to go my own way. And I was brought back to Christ through the ministry of student evangelists, and a radical Christian group, and a large suburban charismatic church, and a small inner-city Anglo-Catholic church, and a cathedral which was always open, and two professors of theology. One day if you ask me I'll tell you the full story. But using all those places and people, Jesus led me back to his

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table, and he leads me back still. As our sister Tracey says in her words at the back of this Cathedral church, so I can say to the poor man, Jesus; "I felt you and I knew you loved me". So I did sit and eat and for fifty-three years off and on I have known him and he has never done me any harm. And for me he will the first and the last word always.

Friends, it's good finally to be visible here. Kate and I are so grateful for your prayers and support, and for your patience over these months of transition and arrival. I also want to thank those who have led the diocese in the months since Bishop James retired, and especially to thank Bishop Richard, the members of the Diocesan core group and leadership team, and the staff team at St James House, and everyone in every church community and school and chaplaincy here. And the Dean and Chapter and their colleagues on the Cathedral team who have worked so hard to make this service a reality.

My brother Malcolm and my brother Phil read this earlier about Jesus:

I will put my Spirit upon him,  
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

And then:

He will not wrangle or cry aloud...  
until he brings justice to victory.  
And in his name the peoples will hope.

And all this, the table and the poor man and justice brought to victory, all this is my vision of the church of Jesus Christ. A mixed group of ordinary people with the most extraordinary gift to share. And because the gift is so marvellous, that's why I want the church to grow. Not so that we can have a bigger church, but so that we can make a bigger difference. So that the poor man's table may be laid in every street. I want every church to grow.

The church does not grow so that it can survive. It is not our survival that matters. The church matters because Jesus matters, he who wants everyone's company, he who built the church on a rock, he who wants the table to be laid in every street.

The growth of the Church is a good in itself. We share the news about Jesus Christ so that people can come to know Him, and knowing Him is very good. So because I want people to hear the name of Jesus I want the Church to grow, because the poor Christ wants their company. That's why I'm committed to our mixed economy of parish churches and fresh expressions of the church, a people who can bring from their storehouse both the new and the old, so that all might know Jesus, the poor carpenter and the beautiful shepherd who is so ancient and so new.

Now is a good time for all this. The Church of England used to be in a spiritually dangerous place: we were cushioned by privilege, we were in the middle of our society and at the top. Now, in this England, we're on the edge and underneath - marginalised, not always taken seriously, sometimes mocked. That's good news for us. Because on the edge and underneath is where the people are.

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Pope Francis says: "An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others." The Bishop of Rome's vision is my vision for the church among the churches, for all the churches, as we gather again on the edge.

From the edge we give our gift, the knowledge of Jesus. Oh, that all people might know Him, and the power of His resurrection. Man and woman, rich and poor, gay and straight, black and white, conservative and progressive, believer and unbeliever, Jesus longs for our company. And his welcome is absolute.

The growth of the Church is a good in itself. But then those who sit at the poor man's table are called to follow their host. Jesus, who proclaimed justice, and who brought justice to victory.

In this region we know about justice. It does not come without a struggle. It can take a long time. It demands patience, and the utmost truthfulness. In this region we have the example of the Hillsborough families, of their quiet perseverance and their patient and courageous refusal to be distracted or to despair.

And it is a matter of great pride to me that I walk in the footsteps of Bishop James Jones who sought to serve those families, and the memory of the ninety-six, and who in this Cathedral church presented a little of that story of truth. And I honour Bishop James, and Bishop David before him, and all those with them who sat at the poor man's table and who seek justice for the downtrodden. I am borne up by their memory.

And I stand here now as part of the poor man's community of justice. A bishop is always in the midst of a people, that's why I asked our Synod to accompany me up the hill from the centre of the city to the Cathedral today. I do not arrive on my own. I stand in the midst of the poor man's people and we are a people of justice, and from every community and every church we know those who care for the hungry and the needy and who speak for them and who lift their heads, and in the midst of you I commit myself to support you and to pray for you and to do what I can to be with you in that struggle.

Because this too is my vision of the church - a group of people who know Jesus and who proclaim justice. Because it is Jesus, we will not turn away from justice. Because it is Jesus, we will not wrangle or cry aloud or break the broken or ignore those who struggle. When I was involved as an activist in the peace movement of the 80s and 90s we had a saying, "there is no way to peace - peace is the way". Peace, and telling the truth.

In that spirit we in the church are called to approach our own troubles and disagreements. I do not seek a pure church if the price of a pure church is that our sisters and brothers are excluded, if the price of a pure church is a smaller table. The

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growth of the Church is a good in itself, so long as the poor Christ sits beside each one of us at His table and teaches us to love.

Together with your order of service today you will hopefully have received a badge. This badge represents our Diocese - that lovely image, is it a boat? Is it a book? Is it a cross? It's all these things. If you belong to the Diocese of Liverpool I ask you to wear this badge as a sign that where you are, the poor man's table is open. If you're a guest here today I ask you to take this badge home and to keep it as a token of our promise - we will be there for you, for all in this region, to walk and work with you in the way of peace, to spread the table of love, until our God brings justice to victory. And in the poor man's name the peoples will hope.

***Jesus, may your name be first and last in all we say and do; and draw us to your Father in the power of the Spirit. Bring justice to victory. We ask this in your name, Jesus.***

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