**A sermon preached by Christopher Cocksworth,**

**Bishop of Coventry,**

**at the Chrism Eucharist and Renewal of Ministerial Vows**

**in Coventry Cathedral Maundy Thursday, 2022**

**Isaiah 61.1-9; James 5. 13-20; Luke 16-30**

**I Kings 17.8-24; John 19.25-30**

**Ruined cities**

They shall build up the ancient ruins,

they shall raise up the former devastations;

they shall repair the ruined cities,

the devastations of many generations.

That’s the story of this Cathedral and this city: repairing the ruined city, raising up the former devastations into new life.

That was the story of Stalingrad, now Volgograd, Dresden, Hiroshima.

It was the story of Jerusalem: the holy city.

Pray God it will be the story – in time of Mariupol, Khakiv, Odessa.

Not just the buildings though but, as the prophet promised, this is the work of God’s good news for the people who suffer in the ruined cities:

* healing for the broken hearted,
* liberty for the captives
* release for the prisoners
* strength for the weak
* consolation for the grieving
* good news for the oppressed.

The prophecy – Jesus promised – fulfilled the hearing of the people of Nazareth’s synagogue.

The prophecy sealed on the cross, demonstrated in the resurrection, applied in the faith and action of the church.

**Living among ruins, and bringing life**

Do you ever has a sense that the faith, the life of the church, the place of the faith and the church in society has been bombarded now for some decades, some centuries, and that each generation of Christians – especially the Church’s ministers – think that they (we) will be the ones to defend the city, to turn the tide of battle and rebuild the former devastations.

Many of us have been doing that work and ministry for decades, some for fewer years but with no less determination. And we’ve seen good things happen, lives transformed, the church growing, the kingdom coming.

And then we get knocked down: Covid comes and another wave of bombing cascades upon us and the work of many years crumbles, that which has been built up, falls away and we are pushed back.

The strain and stress on society over these years has been immense, and its knock on effects – including the cost of living crisis that touches us all as people and ministers – run deep.

Whatever sphere of society I encounter, I see the cost of Covid, and the reality of long-Covid economically, socially, politically, personally, spiritually: politics, business, education, social work, health work and of course Christian ministry.

The leaders and servants of those spheres are tired, some are reassessing whether they can go on.

You are tired, so am I. Some of you are reassessing whether you can go on. Maybe all of us are grieving what has been lost and, though we can see what might in time be gained, we wonder whether we have the energy to climb the hill.

I tried to speak into the situation we find ourselves in at this point in history in the vision I shared in the videos. It’s a vision rooted in the gift of life – the life that God has given to the world that (as we celebrate on Easter Day), is so strong, so good, so full, so loved by God that it cannot be overcome by death.

I spoke of how we are called to be bearers of life, sharers of life, agents of God’s life-giving energy in the world – the unconquerable energy of God’s love.

I set out a vision of:

* restored health
* new life and
* renewed relationships.

**Easter faith**

I want us to think about those three themes in relation to the Easter Faith that we renew this week and to the oils that we bless today and receive for ministry.

***Easter is the restoration of health by divine multiplier.*** The dead body of Jesus is not restored to what it was. It is resurrected into what is to come – to incorruptible life and health. It is a new act of divine creation. That is what we believe. Life out nothing on the day of creation. Life out of the nothingness of death on the day of resurrection. That is our God.

***Receive the oil of healing today***: receive it for yourself in Easter faith and minister it joyfully with Easter faith.

Let it be sign for you this day that God desires your health, that God loves your body, your mind, your spirit, that you are good and beautiful and that you need rest, that you need to care for yourself, that God wants to build up whatever is ruined in you. That God says to you the words of the flight attendant: ‘Put the mask on yourself before you put it on your children’.

Receive it believing that God is the restorer of life: God did for the widow of Zarephath, God did it for Naaman the Syrian, God did it for Lazarus and God did it supremely for Jesus.

***Easter is the recreation of humanity, the renewal of the whole of creation into new life***. That’s who God is and that’s what God does. God is the giver of life: the creator. Nothing will stop God giving life: not secularism, not covid not even the Church of England! God loves life and loves it into being.

**Receive the oil of baptism**: receive it as a sign for yourself in Easter faith and minister it joyfully with Easter faith. God has been making disciples of Jesus Christ for two millennia, and there are more today than ever before in human history. And God’s not going to stop now.

Let this oil of baptism be a sign to you of your baptism: your indelible baptism, God’s irrevocable word to you in your baptism, your life in Christ who gave his life for you so that you could live in his risen life, your calling to share that life of the kingdom of God with those whom you’ve been sent to serve.

***Easter is the renewal of relationships by the grace of reconciliation.*** You have been reconciled to God – the infinite, eternal, all-powerful God, creator and sustainer of this vast, unfathomable, utterly beautiful, endlessly mysterious creation. This God loves you so much sent he sent his only beloved son to die for love of your love, to be spent to save you from your sins of destruction, to descend into hell to raise you to heaven.

***Receive the oil of chrism***: receive it as a sign for yourself in Easter faith and minister it joyfully with Easter faith.

Let this oil be a sign of your anointing: the empowerment of your baptism, the strengthening of your confirmation, the gifting of your ordination to be ambassadors of Christ and ministers of reconciliation.

**The gospel and its ministers today**

And do not doubt, amidst whatever ruins you walk, whatever collapse of church life you find, whatever erosion of Christian culture in the land that feels like a wound in your soul that this gospel with which are entrusted is as relevant today as it was when prophesied by Isaiah and when Jesus promised the good news had come in him, and when the old Cathedral was built in its medieval splendour and destroyed in his modern misery.

People need healing into health.

People need new hope, new joy, new life.

People need putting their relationships right.

Bishop John and I say to you as your bishops:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon you,

because he has anointed you in Christ

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent you to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free

and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.

And what better place in all the world than the new Cathedral of Coventry to know that:

We shall build up the ancient ruins,

we shall raise up the former devastations;

we shall repair the ruined cities,

the devastations of many generations.