

Coventry Cathedral – 11th October 2026

Loving God, Gentle God, Reconciling God – help us to hear your words of grace and wisdom as we worship in unity and peace.

It's a joy and an honour to be with you this morning. I've visited Coventry Cathedral many times, on reconciliation pilgrimages; for Sunday services, departures of Deans and installation of Bishops; for conferences and as a member of the wonderful Coventry Cathedral Chorus – hi Liam! ...but I never ever imagined climbing this spiral staircase to this pulpit to share some thoughts with you.

I am rather high up... but from up here, I have got a great view of you wonderful people...and the beautiful windows in this iconic building.

We worship together in a Cathedral formed out of courage and commitment to peace and reconciliation, in the midst of a City that knows the pain of destruction and the potential of resurrection. Coventry's story of healing and hope is the main reason I moved to the area eighteen months ago. The reconciliation ministry of this Cathedral and Diocese offers justice and unity to a world consumed by deepening inequality and division.

I wish I knew your stories and what drew you to worship in Coventry Cathedral. I wonder if you're here because of the Cathedral's foundation in peace and reconciliation?

In my own reconciliation journey, I've visited countries where terrible conflict and efforts at peace building are part of the nation's narrative – South Africa, Rwanda, Cambodia, Israel-Palestine and Northern Ireland. My current role is to connect and gather those working in justice and reconciliation in the UK Anglican Church, to pray together, share stories of local contexts – the challenges and joys of peacebuilding – and to try to influence the wider church to understand that reconciliation is a missional imperative. As society becomes more fractured and fear driven, surely churches who prioritise healing and peace will be sanctuaries of hope for their communities?

Reconciliation is not a ministry confined to those who have specific training and skills in conflict resolution and mediation, to those who work overseas in war-torn countries, it's Christ's call to each and every one of us, in our most ordinary, everyday lives, because at its heart, reconciliation is

about relationship - relationship with God, relationship with others, and relationship with ourselves. As Christians, we are called to be reconcilers in our families, our churches, our local communities.

This morning's passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians¹ offers some beautiful encouragement in how to be reconcilers. Paul is writing to the Christian community in Philippi, guiding them in how to restore unity. Unusually in his writings, Paul highlights a specific issue between two women, Euodia and Syntyche, who seem to be at loggerheads with each other, causing wider division in their communities. It's likely they are deacons, each a leader of a house group. Fall-outs within the church is clearly an age-old issue!

In Paul's guidance to the Philippians on how to be of the same mind as Christ, there was one word that really stood out to me. I believe it is a quality of reconciliation that is so desperately needed in present day society and that we can each nurture in our own lives – and that word is...gentleness.

Gentleness is a profoundly counter-cultural way of being – a characteristic undervalued in a world that is getting faster, more competitive, reactive and confrontational – gentleness is something I increasingly notice and long for in my everyday encounters.

Gentleness conjures up thoughts of care and kindness – there's a softness and compassion in gentleness, even in how the word sounds. But such tenderness doesn't equate to weakness or passivity. The book of Galatians names gentleness as a fruit of the spirit² and Jesus describes himself as gentle in Matthew 11³ as he invites us to learn from and rest in him. To nurture gentleness within ourselves and towards ourselves so that we might be gentle with others is deeply important in our spiritual journey, in our own transformation to be more like Christ.

I've had a bit of a week! Nine days ago, my nearly 96-year-old Dad who's been determined to remain independent and live alone, had a nasty fall in the street behind his flat in Leicester. The kindness of several members of the public meant Dad was quickly blue-lighted to hospital and diagnosed with a brain bleed. Provided he is fit enough, I hope to transfer him to a care home near Leamington on Monday.

¹ Philippians 4:1-9

² Galatians 5:22-23

³ Matthew 11:29

Having spent over a week driving in and out of Leicester hospitals and checking out several Warwickshire care homes, I've now passed the test on navigating Leicester's one-way system (hard as it is, it's definitely easier than the Coventry ring-road) and I now understand that good quality care costs a small fortune. I'm obviously not just feeling but looking very tired, since during a care home visit, not just one but two older people over ninety asked me if I was looking for respite or moving in permanently! Personally, I find myself drawn to those care homes that offer wine with lunch rather than a range of craft activities!

But in the midst of the exhausting events of this last week, I have been so moved by the gentleness of the medical staff who care for my Dad. In wards of sick, sometimes stroppy patients who often have competing and urgent needs - toileting, washing, dressing, eating, medication, the ceaseless patience, grace and humour of nursing staff, the unrushed time and dedication they give to each person's care is remarkable. And I have so appreciated the staff's gentleness with me when I've felt anxious about my Dad.

And in each of the residential homes I visited I've found an environment of gentleness that offers time and space to older people enabling them to retain their dignity and independence as much as possible.

I've also noticed the reconciling nature of gentleness between me and my Dad in the midst of our individual struggles with current events. We can both be stubborn and argumentative at times, particularly with each other. But when I let go of my worries and urgent To Do list, and simply sat next to his bed, and cut and filed his rather long, chipped ninety-five-year-old finger nails I experienced presence and peace. As I gently gave him a personal manicure for the first time in our lives, Dad closed his eyes and went to sleep – and our relationship somehow deepened.

Gentleness is creating space for another, it's listening rather than reacting, being curious about their story, their needs and concerns rather than our own agenda. Gentleness is having a hospitable heart rather than a spirit of control, it's responding to hostility or conflict with grace not retaliation. To embody gentleness means we have the inner strength needed to remain present with another even in the most challenging of circumstances.

Earlier this year, a senior leader in the Church of England shared with me that whilst she found many Christians attracted to the ministry of peace and reconciliation, very few seemed to have peace within themselves.

Cultivating gentleness is essential in deepening peace within and with others. How we nurture gentleness in ourselves will depend to some extent on who we are, on how and where we feel most rooted and whole. For my best mate, gentleness is found in willow weaving, particularly in the companionship of other weavers. Gentleness may also speak to our souls through the beauty of our environment, whether that be woods and water, city streets or Cathedrals.

And of course, there's prayer. Where I find gentleness most deeply rooted is in silent/contemplative prayer. In choosing to be present with God, we consent to healing, consent to peace through simply 'showing up' in our commitment to a daily practice. Whilst such a prayer discipline is rarely easy, I and others who are part of an on-line contemplative prayer community, find ourselves 'dis-eased' without it. Please don't be put off silent prayer because your head is always busy and you think it's about emptying of the mind. Once we understand that having thoughts during silence is merely human and that returning again and again to a simple prayer word, in time with our breathing, *is* actually the practice, the more we can cultivate gentleness for ourselves and for each other.

As Chris Whittington, the founder of the School of Contemplative Life says, 'The focus of meditation is not to obtain an extraordinary life for ourselves, but to live our ordinary life extraordinarily well, *together*.'⁴

So, sisters and brothers, let us cultivate gentleness in our relationships – let us be the reconcilers in our ordinary, everyday lives and encounters, and in so doing, 'Let our gentleness be known to everyone... and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.'

Amen

⁴ Chris Whittington, *The Missing Peace*, Canterbury Press, London, 2025, p.3