

**Sermon Preached on the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018 St Paul's Cathedral  
Festival of Sons & Friends of the Clergy  
By The Rt Revd Sarah Mullally**

**Deuteronomy 31:14-29**

**1 John 3:1-10**

At the beginning of this year, a rocket was launched from India putting into space a satellite which can take high resolution, full colour, video of the earth from space. For decades we have been able to see photos of course but video is a whole new territory. The innovation will help with environmental issues and with military planning and with emergency relief efforts, among other things.

Now my age has been written in most national newspapers this weekend, so I am not giving anything away when I say I remember vividly the first photographs of earth taken from the moon. How small it made me feel. It changed my perspective, for a while at least. For it is as hard to grasp the smallness of ourselves, as it is to grasp the vastness of the universe. A tiny fragile orb spinning insignificantly in an ocean of star-studded blackness.

The Psalmist reminds us 'When I look up to your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?' ( 8:3-4).

When we can grasp this perspective, it puts into context the struggles – whether global, local or individual - that consume our energy, our hopes and our fears.

It is a matter of perspective – when we make ourselves the centre of the universe, it is often our insecurities which drive and motivate us. When we think of ourselves as individuals, we undermine community cohesion. Our focus is on how to protect what we are and have, rather than appreciating the fulness of community in all its diversity.

We often find our identity in our roles – for me that is as a mother, as a bishop, as a wife (and not always in that order!) - and also in terms of our success in the world. But thinking of ourselves in terms of our success means that society becomes focused on the individual, on individualism, and we risk losing the connectedness between each other. It is these connections, the invisible bonds that tie us together on our streets, our villages, our towns, our workplaces, our city, that form a tapestry of connections which underpin a truly compassionate society.

As Christians we believe that in the light of the resurrection, our confidence does not come from the world or what the world sees as successful, it comes from the knowledge of the Father's love, which means we are called children of God. The prophet Isaiah tells us that God has engraved us on the palm of his hands – an image of lives, held by God, secure in him.

And we are loved not because of what we have done nor because of what we have achieved – we are loved unconditionally regardless of these things. And it is this love – which most of us spend our whole lives searching for, only to find it has been there all the time. It is this that binds us together. Love that draws us closer to God but also closer to each other.

By seeing ourselves in this wider perspective – of a universe created and loved by God, redeemed by Christ Jesus and as children beloved of God, we can have the confidence to follow the pattern of Christ who counted others better than himself and washed their feet – even the one who was to betray him. This gives us freedom to build community by valuing and not fearing difference, to have the confidence to understand that we have more in common than those things which divide us.

Former Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu drew on the African understanding of interconnectedness when he changed the old adage ‘I think therefore I am’ into ‘I am human, therefore I belong...I am because you are’.

Strong communities hold the possibility of changing the world, but they don’t just happen. To unlock the potential of communities, they need attention, love and support. Pope Francis characterizes growth in holiness as the journey in community, side-by-side with others. And as such, if part of the community is rejoicing, the whole rejoices; if part of the community is hurting, the whole is hurting. It is this reality that summons us to sit and comfort those who mourn. It is this reality that summons us to the action to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry and to rejoice with those who rejoice. This is the reality for those who are ordained – they rejoice but they also mourn and they also struggle at times.

Life is wonderful in ministry but it is not always easy, it is not without challenge. St Luke’s Healthcare for the Clergy found in a recent survey of clergy that around 12% of those who responded said they were struggling or hardly coping. Two-thirds of those said they frequently considered giving up their role in the Church because of stress. A review of the recent BBC series *A Vicar’s Life* described rural clergy as the “last social workers in the countryside”. Whether in rural or urban contexts – and I have seen them both – the demands of ministry can be relentless.

As part of our community, the Sons and Friends of the Clergy have responded to those in need since 1655 and I am delighted that your objectives now cover not just hardship and poverty and the relief of illness, but also the promotion of health, meaning that you will also support the prevention of illness and the promotion of wellbeing. And this is important in this week when we remember mental health. When one-in-four of us this year will be diagnosed with a mental health issue. Thank you for responding so generously when part of our community is hurting. Thank you for your compassion and for living out the nature of God.

As we approach Pentecost, let us celebrate the life that we have because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ because of the love of the Father and let us celebrate community which is created by the Holy Spirit and may you know the joy of the risen Christ as you continue your work. Amen