

IOW Deanery Inauguration, January 20, 2016

I have become fascinated by what makes a particular location distinctive. St. Paul, writing to Ephesians as we've heard this evening, urges his hearers to allow Christ to dwell in their hearts as they are "rooted and grounded in love." My fascination with location was sparked in part by a Christmas present I received from my colleagues at Bishopsgrrove who gave Sally and me the most thoughtful and creative present we received this Christmas. They gave us something edible produced (although not necessarily grown) in every part of the diocese. So I received, among other things, some pickles made in Petersfield, coffee and cashew nuts packaged in Portsmouth – perhaps an indication of the international nature of the port; there were sweets and honey made in Fareham and of course, garlic mayonnaise from here on the IOW. The gift made me engage in a new way with the diocese. As well as seeing the sights of each different part of the diocese and listening to the distinctive sounds, I can now taste each location through the ale brewed in Gosport, the chocolates made in Havant, the preserves made in Bishop's Waltham.

The gift reminded me that the locality matters. All of us are rooted, to use St Paul's word, in a particular place, living in a particular landscape, sharing life with a particular community of people. Jesus knew this of course. He knew the taste of the fish that were freshly caught in Galilee, and understood the culture of the fishermen and the people in the villages along the lakeside. Some of you will, I hope, have that experience next year on the Holy Land Pilgrimage from the Island, as a few of you did with me last year. Jesus knew intimately the people of Nazareth having grown up there – more than well enough to realise that when he returned there with his reputation as a prophet and a teacher, he would be roundly rejected by his own people. He knew the smells and the rhythms of each individual landscape – landscape that shaped his faith and continues to shape our own thousands of years later.

We gather here today to celebrate one very particular and special place: the Isle of Wight. And it was wholly appropriate that just now we received symbols of what makes this place so special and unique: celebrating farming as we held the west of the island in our prayers, commerce as we remembered the trade that takes place in the centre of the island and elsewhere; giving thanks for the tourism industry, the sailing community. And of course holding before God the one thing that binds us all together – visitors and residents on the island – the ferries. The symbols you've brought today remind us that we experience life on the island with all our senses – with the smell of the sea air, the taste of the food that's grown here, the sound of the announcements on the IOW ferry, the sight of tourist attractions that people travel miles to enjoy, the touch of money changing hands and goods exchanged.

Each of these experiences deepens our love for this place and our belonging together. And they are the gifts that, as one united deanery, form the core tools of your witness as together you minister and teach, comfort and evangelise in Jesus' name. Whether you choose to provide encouragement in the form of chocolates from Ryde or Godshill; whether you provide hospitality perhaps including some locally grown garlic or chillis or tomatoes; whether you decide together to launch a new mission to the boating community on the island or sense God's

call to reach out to tourists in fresh ways, the advent of the new deanery releases you to work collaboratively in fresh and exciting ways. You all have a stake in tourism; you all have a stake in agriculture, in the poorer estates of the island, in the sea faring communities, in the history and heritage of this place.

So work together, grow together, enjoy this opportunity to make new friendships between individuals and fresh connections between parishes that previously had little contact. And do so always in the name of Him who, in the words of St Paul, “by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” – Jesus Christ our Lord.

Bishop Christopher