

Sermon at the Service of Installation and Welcome

Wells Cathedral

8th February 2026

The Right Reverend Fiona Gibson

Standing here before you all, at the beginning of something so new and overwhelming (in a good way!), I have a sense of hope and joy at what lies ahead; of astonishment at the weighty gift being entrusted to me, to serve and lead here with and among you as a bishop in the Church of God; and of a profound peace that the Lord who has called me, who calls each of us, is faithful, and he will do all.

At the consecration service on Friday, Archbishop Stephen said to Jean and to me just before he ordained us to be bishops, “You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God.” So very true!

What will be needed most, I suspect, is the gift that the writer of Proverbs celebrates in our first reading: Wisdom. The gift that Solomon was praised for asking for. The gift we all need as we navigate troubling times. Wisdom from God.

Wisdom, we discover in Proverbs 8, is a central aspect of God’s own character. It runs through creation, it runs through all of God’s plans from creation to new creation to restore everything – all of humanity, all of creation – in Christ. Wisdom was before everything else other than the love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and wisdom leads to delight. Delight in creation, delight in humanity, delight in God.

Wisdom is something we all need every day, and St James encourages us in his letter to pray for it, assuring us that God will give it generously. Wisdom that is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. This is the wisdom we all need to live for Christ, and the wisdom we need to be able to read the signs of our times and respond as Christians to everything we see.

This sort of wisdom isn’t something we can manufacture for ourselves. It comes as a gift from the one who is eternally and completely wise, God himself.

Wisdom comes from God, and from knowing God, and from knowing who we are in God. We are creatures, he is the Creator. We are worshippers, he is the only one worthy of our worship. He is *on* the throne, and we are *around* it. Having those realities in the right order is the way to wisdom.

That’s the powerful image in St John’s vision of the reality of the continuous worship in heaven, in which we join here in this cathedral this afternoon, and in which we join every time God’s people gather to praise him, to be fed by word and sacrament, and to pray for his help in every church in every parish across the Diocese and beyond.

Just as Jesus and the disciples saw a window into heaven at Jesus’ baptism so now John sees a door wide open. The door that, once opened, is now always open. The images come thick and fast. There’s no description of the One who sits on the throne, but in images that conjure up God’s rainbow promise in Genesis, the thunder and lightning that accompanied the giving of the law on Sinai, and Ezekiel’s vision of heaven and of the Lord, John attempts to describe the indescribable in human language.

The living creatures and the elders worship God continuously, with a call and response singing of God's holiness and worthiness. The holiness and worthiness of the living God are the source and theme of all true worship. He is the eternal one, the Creator, the sustainer, the one who was, who is, and who is to come. This is the God who is sitting on the throne of heaven, even now, and whom we worship in song and word just as the living creatures and the elders do.

And wisdom, true wisdom, is living in the light of God's holiness and power, his majesty, mercy, glory, and grace. Wisdom is responding in worship to and of this living God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

That's the story we have been given to live and to tell. That's the call of God to each one of us. In a world of turmoil, where racism, abuse, personal power, hatred, and division are all around us, the wisdom of God calls us to model a different way, to tell a different story, to sing a different song. To live and to tell the story of gentleness, of grace, of love, and of the hope found in Jesus Christ. To live and tell the story that the way to greatness is through humility, that the way to wholeness is through Christ's brokenness, that the way to live is to die to self and to find in that death perfect restoration and resurrection, that the way to power is found through weakness, and that the way to love is found in looking not to our own needs but to the needs of others.

In other words, to live and tell the story that there is a throne in heaven and someone is sitting on it. That this world, both full of horrors and full of beauty, is God's creation and that he is working through each of us, as we follow Jesus Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to undo the horrors and restore the beauty. That God is the one sitting on the throne and that all earthly rulers and leaders will one day bow to him, willingly or unwillingly, and will cast down their crowns and, yes, cast down their mitres, and sing "*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.*"

Only God is worthy of our ultimate trust and worship. That's the way to a life of grounded hope, faith, and joy that we're called live. That's the way to wisdom.

So, as I stand here, on the cusp of something exciting and overwhelming, I close with some words paraphrased from a sermon first preached by St Augustine on the anniversary of his ordination as a bishop. In the past I've adapted them for the ordination of priests, and for the consecration of a dear friend when she became a bishop. Today I speak them as an extended prayer request to you all. That as I begin a new way of life, grounded always in my primary identity of a beloved and forgiven child of God, together with Bishop Michael and all of us, we may all seek to be and to do all that God is calling us to be and to do as we live and tell the story of Jesus in every place in this Diocese and beyond. So here's the prayer request:

From this point, I will be a bishop *for* you, and a Christian *with* you. In all, of course, I will be sustained by Christ, our great high priest, but I will need you to pray for me. There will be times when I am terrified by what I am *for* you, and will then need to be comforted by what I am *with* you.

Being a bishop *for* you is an office I undertake. Being a Christian *with* you is the deeper identity, the safe harbour that will remind me to take rest in the marvellous benefit of being redeemed by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, conveyed on all Christians.

So, please assist me with your prayers as I go about my tasks of correcting the turbulent, cheering up the faint-hearted, refuting opposition to the gospel, teaching the unlearned, stirring up the indolent, checking the argumentative, putting the proud in their place, setting the desperate on their feet, helping the needy, liberating the oppressed, backing the good, preaching repentance from the bad, and loving all.

Then, truly, as we all do these things, the message of peace with God open for all – the greatest of good news, the song of salvation – will be heard in every place; lives will be transformed; the light of Christ will shine in the darkness; and our God will be glorified in all.

Amen.