

Address for Sarum College Awards Ceremony, Saturday 14 March 2026

Rt Revd Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester

Readings: Psalm 100 and Ephesians 3: 14-21

'Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.'

Amid the news of our broken world in which conflict rages and people far away and close at hand are suffering - diminished, abused and others - Do we imagine and dream?

In January I was in Israel-Palestine for the 3rd time in 3 years. This is not the place for me to share all that I would want to say, but I was particularly struck on this visit by people's weariness with the occupation, and an inability to dream of what could be - an inability to imagine a different future.

One of our visits was to the Arab evangelical school in Bethlehem, I was struck not only by the emphasis on education – parents' deep desire for their children to be well educated for whatever the future might be, but also the commitment to keep identity alive and to stimulate imagination, through a focus on the art and music of Palestinian culture. [It's interesting isn't it that in our own society there has seemingly been a reduction in the value placed on the arts in the formation of children and young people, even though these things keep our imagination alive and provoke our thoughts and emotions as we look deep within ourselves ...and beyond ourselves... - This is something I want us to reflect on this morning...*And what a joy to look in the programme today and see that there is a Master of Arts in theology, imagination and culture!*

On the whole, *children* are very good at imagination – just observe their play, and the things and stories they love, not least of imagined kingdoms and magic and mystery. Yet, as we grow into adults, somewhere along the way we seem to lose that art of dream and imagination.

Today we are celebrating those receiving awards; and we are celebrating things lived, created and completed - but we are also looking to the future, and I wonder what each of you is daring to imagine and dream?

In don't know the personal stories you are currently inhabiting – perhaps you are primarily in a place of great celebration, or perhaps you are carrying hurt or fear. Yet in all of that, I wonder what you are daring to imagine in this adventure called life, particularly as you open yourselves to the Holy Spirit at work within you, around you and between you.

in Palestine, even amid the art And music, a word which is used very sparingly is the word 'hope'. In a place where optimism is almost absent, there is real clarity that hope is not optimism; And one of the challenges for Christian leaders is how they speak of hope and keep hope alive.

Today, as you stand in the present giving thanks for the past and looking to your future, and indeed the future of our world, I believe you are called - we are called - to be **purveyors of hope, and sign makers for the kingdom of God x 2**. If I can steal a phrase from Walter Bruggeman, I would say this takes 'hopeful imagination'.

Some of you may have heard me say this before, but I believe we are living in a 'fix it' culture which on the whole lacks imagination. I see it in government - I see it in the Church.

We are constantly identifying problems to fix without asking WHY? And that thing we call strategy so often seems to lack its counterpart 'vision', and instead becomes a series of trying to fix problem without first painting a picture of 'why' and 'for what'. In the Church our strategy so easily becomes all about trying to fix problems around resource: Not enough money to do X, Y and Z; too many church buildings and lack of funding to repair them; not enough people or clergy ... And we could go on.

In my role as Anglican Bishop for Prisons, I get so frustrated by a constant rhetoric of 'we need to lock more people up and for longer', and because we have a prison capacity crisis our 'fix it' is to keep talking about building more prisons. Yet we are failing to ask 'why' and first identifying what the big picture of transformation looks like.

I don't know what the 'fix it' problems are in your contexts or spheres of life, but the danger is that we fail to lift our eyes to first see the big picture. To use that rather overused phrase: 'What would good look like?'

I don't know if any of you are fans of the TV programme, The Repair Shop? People e bringing broken and damaged loved items from their lives or often from the lives of family members, and they bring them in the hope that they will be restored to their former glory. And in the imagination of those who are repairing the battered and worn ancient chair, or the doll or the clock – in the repairer's imagination there is a clear idea of what the restored item might look like. That is the starting place, and it is so different from the 'fix-it' culture in which no one has first painted an imaginative

picture of what it is we think transformed life might look like and then acted accordingly.

Why are we mending the church roof or wanting to grow the church younger? Or why are we asking for more money to do a particular thing? And why are we wanting to build more prisons? Are we clear on the WHY and for what purpose? Have we first painted the big picture of the vision of transformed society, so we know the why and the what??

For those of us here who are followers of Jesus Christ, this is about a kingdom of God vision. Here and yet not yet. How are we immersing ourselves in the overarching story of salvation, and the reality of our God who is making all things new? After all, every day we pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as in heaven. What might that look like?

I find it fascinating that the Old Testament prophets painted pictures with beautiful imagery and imagination: Justice flowing like rivers; wolves dwelling with lambs; swords being beaten into ploughshares; people sitting under their own vines...

These pictures of a future with God painted a strong picture of hope and possibility by stretching the imagination of people's hearts and minds and souls. And this was coupled with a recognition of past and present brokenness and sin - broken relationship with God, with one another and with all of creation - and yet the hope that one day all of that will be made new. Those beautiful words in Revelation 21 of no more tears, no more dying and no more pain God dwelling with us and us with God .and all of creation fully restored and transformed. The shalom of everything in perfect relationship. Nothing can undo the crucifixion of Christ. Nothing can undo Christ's resurrection. And God's kingdom is here and God's kingdom is coming. And the Holy Spirit is at work. And by the way this is *God's* church. And it is God who will bring everything to fulfilment and restoration. So often we need to be reminded that it is God who is God - let us not live as if everything is on our shoulders and that somehow the resurrection might be undone if we don't try and save it. Let us not forget that we are God's people and the sheep of God's pasture (Psalm 100).

So, in our life adventure as we lift our eyes to that immense kingdom-of-God vision, how do we, as individuals, and together as the Church, paint and articulate local kingdom-of-God vision of transformation in our different contexts, in order to be greater purveyors of hope, and better sign-makers for the kingdom of God, opening ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit within us and around us?

And please don't think I am talking about escapism - denying the reality of present struggle, pain and brokenness. I only have to look around me in my local

communities – or look to the horrors which continue to unfold across our world, not least as I continue to hold in mind that recent visit to Palestine and Israel.

On Ash Wednesday many of us will have received the sign of the cross made in ash on our forehead, and we will have heard those words 'Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return' - but following those words of pain and frailty came those words, 'Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ'. Here is the recognition of our human frailty and brokenness and yet infused with hope as we turn to Christ, knowing that death and dust will not have the final word; that the light will always be stronger than the darkness, and that hope is stronger than despair...

As I remember that I am but dust and to dust I shall return, I also feed my hopeful imagination with that scientific view that all the elements that make up the human body originally came from the dust of exploding stars. Now is not the time for us to debate how or when human beings came into existence, except I do want to say that God the creator was and is in it all. Transforming hope and restoration are at the heart of who God is.

Everyone receiving an award, and indeed everyone here, IS a star - loved and precious - made in the image of God - possibly even *from* stars – called and known by name. And even in our pain and struggle we are still held in the transforming love of God who is making all things new.

Of course, there IS much to fix and repair and restore, in a world in which all our brokenness emanates from broken relationship with God and with one another and with all of creation; But I do believe that lifting our eyes and opening our imaginations to paint and articulate what kingdom of God good might look in our different contexts, and beyond on the canvas of our society and world - I do believe we will not only better recognise the signs of the kingdom of God within us and around us, but we will also be better k of G sign maker and greater purveyors of hope, as we pray for God's kingdom to come on earth as in heaven, and say yes to joining in with transforming the brokenness.

I began by speaking about my visits to Israel and Palestine and that great absence of optimism and the challenge for Christians to hold fast to hope. Well, the final thing I have done on my last 3 visits is to go int the Old City of Jerusalem and to pray at the site of the empty tomb in the Holy Sepulchre – this is the only place from which hope can flow. It is also a place for me of mystery and a place which fuels my imagination and drives me to my knees in a desire to join in a little better with the God of resurrection and transformation and to be a better purveyor of hope, and a greater sign maker for the kingdom of God in who I am and what I do and say.

May it be so for each of us. Congratulations again to everyone receiving an award. Thank you to each and every one of you ...

"I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen".

Rt Revd Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester. 14 March 2026