

**Rough transcript of Paul Bayes' sermon
7th Birthday Celebration for Open Table monthly service for LGBTIQ
Christians - Sunday 19th June 2015**

I said a moment ago how grateful I was to you for your invitation but also for being who you are as a Christian congregation of people, from within and speaking to the LGBTIQ community.

It's a calling on your life. It's a calling on your life for many of you because of the way God made you. It's a calling on your life for all of you because God has called you to be people to proclaim his love.

In a nation and in a church which is so moving so quickly in terms of what it thinks and how it acts towards people of LGBTIQ orientation, moving so quickly that you can have a world where there is legal acceptance and homophobic violence all at once. All that turbulence. And here you are speaking the gospel to one another and to this nation that doesn't know what to do, to this church that's trying to work out how to respond to what God seems to be doing in the West. That's trying to love those in other parts of the world who can't see why these changes are taking place, that's trying to be there within it's own tensions and difficulties, in such a way that together we can understand each other more.

And when I pray for you I pray for courage for you and I thank God for you because of the gift that this congregation is to you and because of the ministry that you've got to the wider church. And when you pray for me, I would ask you to pray that with all the other bishops and leaders of the church we can know when it's right to hold things together and when it's right to move things on. When it's right that the love of Christ should bind us together and when it's right that the love of Christ should call us (indistinct recording) and together we're trying to work out how that is.

As I pray for you I will know after this service better how to pray for you, because I'll know you better, and it's important for me, when you become a Bishop - the Archbishop says about a Bishop, he/she is to know their people and be known by them. Now there's 1.8 million people live in the Diocese of Liverpool and 50,000 of them go to church, so getting to know the people takes a while, I've only been in the job since November, but I can at least make sure that people

know me a little bit. And I want to share something about my own story with you and I want to give you a gift.

So this stole which I'm going to be wearing later on in the service was given to me by a woman called Yvonne Bell. Yvonne used to be in my church when I was a vicar down in Southampton. She doesn't live there any more, she lives near Milton Keynes now. She lives with her partner, Carol, they've been together for nearly 25 years now with their daughter, Ashley. Yvonne makes vestments as a living and paints pictures. She made this for me when I was the vicar of the church as a farewell present when I went off to do the job I did after that. It's got God's rainbow people on it. If you look at it though you won't really be able to see it when I'm doing the service because it will be behind the table, but there'll be a chance for you to look at it later. There are people playing drums, there are people bringing flowers, there's a person in a wheelchair celebrating. There are one or two people looking sad. There is someone playing an african drum, because that's what I used to play in that church when I was the vicar there. It was a gift of love from Yvonne and Carol to me. I've kept it ever since and wear it on occasions like this.

Guy is here and he knows about liturgical things, we should be green today, but because it's your 7th birthday I thought we'd go white.

You'll noticed here that there's a picture of a person with a cup of tea, that's because for Yvonne and for us in that church radical hospitality was what mattered to us. I bring you this to show you, for no reason other than to say it was a gift of love to me from people within the LGBT community and I've always treated it as such. But I've also always noticed in this that some of the rainbow people their heads are down because the world is not a perfect world.

So I come to this. This was also painted by Yvonne, and some of you may know this painting, it's a print. What she's done is, she's an icon painter, and so she's taken a picture of Jesus that appears in lots of icons, he's got a beard and quite a serious face, and she's put him in the middle of a city. It's not Liverpool, but it could be. And she's surrounded him with people who are in need, and the name of the icon is 'Urban Mission'. And it's about the presence of Jesus in the midst of broken people and about the fact that his arms are stretched out in the midst of people who need him so much.

When I was at University I had a nervous breakdown and my life since then has been particularly opened up to people with mental illness, and particularly opened up to people whose pain and the burden they bear is hidden. So when she gave me this, Yvonne gave me this, and I'm told today it's hung on a wall of the chapel in Liverpool where I live. And Guy will have seen it there, and others will. I'm going to give it to you as a gift today, because I want there to be a link between what I think God is ... and your community which expresses that.

I'm not saying by giving you this gift that you're all broken and people, what I am saying is that you are the ones who bring Jesus into the midst of a broken world. Not that the LGBT world is broken but that the whole world is broken. Not that only you are those who bear love, but that the whole church bears love. But because of where the church is at the moment and because of where the nation is at the moment, the pressure of the world is squeezing diamonds out of the church. And the love that you bear one another that's caused you to come here every month, some of you for 7 years, is both the love of broken people for a Christ who can make you whole and the love of Jesus so that you can be whole together. There is no greater gift. In a church where there are many communities like this, but there are also many communities that have missed that, they have missed the welcome of Jesus, they have missed the open table. Instead they put around it hedges of righteousness, exactly like the Bible tells you not to do.

Yesterday I was at a thing that we have in our family every year. We call it the Donkey Dinner. My wife, Kate, she's got two sisters and a brother, and when their parents died they got this silver donkey. And we wanted to keep the family together, this was 20 years ago, we wanted to keep the family together, so what we said was every year we're going to meet and the donkey is going to be in the middle of the table. We're all going to have a big party together and then we're going to pass the donkey from one sister or one brother to another, it goes round every year that someone gets it. This year we've got the donkey, so anyone who comes to my home, you'll see this big silver donkey on our mantle piece and that explains why. It's a table that is there for our family. Seated at that table yesterday was my son who is married to his wife, there was my niece Anna, who is married to her wife Jo, there was my niece Eve, who is in a civil partnership with her partner, Roz. There was a whole generation of kids, who are my kids, my grandchildren's generation. There was a whole bunch of people there in these tables in this farmhouse near Shrewsbury. It was a family, which has unfolded over time in the same way yours has.

It was a family, which is perfectly normal in England today. It was a family where we could show love, and Anna and Jo have just got a new baby, Otis and they made a hat out of a folded newspaper that was in the shape of a mitre. They made it for me but it wouldn't fit me, my head was too big. The only person whose head it would fit was baby Otis's, he's only about 2 months old. So there's a picture on Facebook now of Otis with this mitre. That's Otis, a child of love, maybe one day Otis will be a bishop, I don't know.

But Otis is the future, because Otis speaks of a people where there are no fences and of an open community where people are welcome. They don't have to come, but if they say yes, we say yes. It seems to me, friends, that that's a gift that you have to give the wider church.

What bishops do when they go places, what I do when I go places is to give charges to people. Now if you give someone a charge it implies that you know what you're doing and they don't. That's But I speak to you on behalf of the Diocese of Liverpool, and what I want to say to you is the love that you share and the openness that you manifest, give that as a gift to the wider church. I know that there are those in the wider church who don't want to receive that gift, and so I know that is hard to give it, but if you don't give it, they will not be given. Because you have a gift of an undefended table, that not every Christian has. And if we are one family and one body, and if the Risen Jesus puts himself inside you by his Spirit so that you can shine light on this broken outfit, then I hope and pray that you will continue to give it. And that's my charge to you.

And I ask you to pray for me and for the Bishops of our church and for the leaders of all the churches. I know there are friends here from other Christian families and other families of faith. Please help us by your prayers to know how to be wise as we lead all Christians to see what Jesus really is and means and as we ourselves work out in our own lives and discipleship how that is.

You have a charge from me and I have a lesson and a gift from you. And I pray that we'll continue to give those gifts and charges to one another as we move forward. You can do what you like with this picture, it's a gift, and the way it is with gifts is they come with no strings attached. So if you don't like it, you can give it to Guy who'll put it somewhere else.

But if you like it when you look at it and someone else comes in who didn't hear this talk and says what's that about, all these gloomy people around Jesus, just remember I'm not saying to you, you are the dark ones who need the light, I'm saying to you you have the Spirit. You can bring light to the broken and for that reason I give you this gift. Shall we sit in silence for a moment please.