

A message of grace and mercy from Finland



I was privileged to spend two and half weeks in Finland during September – 11 days on holiday with Roger, exploring Lapland, Tampere and Helsinki and the rest of the time working in Tampere as part of our diocesan link with that diocese. The holiday was wonderful and we enjoyed forest walks, berry picking, time with friends and exploring cities. I also had a special time back in Tampere, preaching at the Old Church in the centre of the city, discussing how we can develop our diocesan link further and attending the Diocesan Synod with Bishop Mark and another priest from Manchester.

The word synod derives from Greek words *syn odos*, a joint journey or a common path and so this was a meeting together of all the clergy to travel on a joint journey, a pilgrimage. We studied and explored what the concept of Grace and Mercy means for society today. We began this by visiting different places in the city in small groups - mosques, prisons, schools, businesses, shops, offices, universities, markets, drug rehabilitation centres, voluntary organisations - with two questions to ask of our hosts. Where is God's grace and mercy seen in this place? Where is there an absence of mercy? On returning from our pilgrimage into the city, we spent time discussing what we had encountered and listened to interviews, reflections by the Bishop, an actor performing monologues, music and time for quiet contemplation.

For these two days, we were immersed in considering the presence and absence of God's grace and mercy. Bishop Matti pointed out that for many of us, the place where we find least mercy is in the way that we look at ourselves. We forget that we have value, given to us by God, and this cannot be lessened by anyone or anything. We forget to love ourselves, we beat ourselves up when we get things wrong and we don't forgive ourselves. We were reminded that the starting point to

experiencing the joy of God's grace and mercy is to love ourselves. When we love ourselves, we can more fully love each other and God, and then God's grace and mercy flows out through us into our homes and communities and our world. At the heart of our Christian belief is the sure and certain knowledge of God's unending love for us, his grace and mercy shown to us when we get things wrong. Our challenge as Christians is to live in the truth of this and sharing it with others. When people encounter our church, the one thing that should be shining out from us is God's love, grace and mercy. This is what makes us different from other communities and this needs to be obvious to all who worship with us or use our buildings.

A song called 'This Common Path' was composed for the Synod and its words are ones that I think help all of us, whether in Finland or in Droylsden to remember that there is one path that we are travelling on – God's path of love, mercy and grace.

This common path our God and Father gave us.
This gift of love and mercy was for all his own.
But paradise has long been just a story.
This path, this pain reflects the sin that we have known.

*Chorus: We seek for guidance forward on our journey.
Now hear our call for help, Oh sacred Triune One!
We stand in need of you and your great mercy,
in greater need, Oh God, than we have every done.*

This common path our Saviour Jesus gave us.
Not only Lord but Brother, he came here to stay.
It was our sins that led him on to Calvary,
but sin and death were crushed on resurrection day.

This common path the Holy Spirit gave us.
It is for us and all our neighbours here to share.
Our lamps must shine to show the light at crossroads
so all can join us on this common pathway fair.