

**Maundy Thursday 2026**

Come Holy Spirit.

In some reflections that Bishop Andrew managed in the weeks leading up to his death, he wrote this: 'Of all the many and varied preaching opportunities offered to bishops, perhaps the most cherished of them all is the chance to preach at the Chrism Eucharist on Maundy Thursday. As clergy and lay leaders from across the diocese gather around word and sacrament in the holiest season of the Church's year; as vows are renewed and oils blessed; so it's hard to overstate the sense of privilege that I, for one, have felt on each such occasion, as I've mounted the steps of the mighty stone pulpit in Guildford Cathedral. With great privilege, though, comes great responsibility'.<sup>1</sup>

Andrew felt the weight of preaching on this day and spent a good deal of time in Lent praying and reflecting on his sermon for this occasion. In that context, I begin this morning with an apology. Lent has afforded me little time to do that this year. Much of it seems a blur since that day on 18 February when, with very little notice or choice for either of us, my beloved friend handed over the leadership of the diocese to me and reeled off things I would need to cover – like preaching at the Chrism Eucharist. What I say this morning, therefore, is less poetry or prose and more from the heart.

I want to begin by saying an enormous thank you to each of you, my sisters and brothers, for extending your arms of love around the special Watson family and the Bishop's Leadership Team. The death of a diocesan bishop in office and so suddenly is – within the living memory of most of us – unprecedented in the Church of England. Furthermore, the deep love for Andrew throughout the diocese has made this an exceptionally painful season. It's at times like this when we need family and I feel so blessed to serve the finest family in the Church of England. As I receive this baton for a liminal season, I pledge to do all I can, in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit, to love and support you.

I also want to say an enormous thank you to our Lord for his everlasting arms that have felt so tangible. During past weeks, I've heard his voice and known his presence in such reassuring ways. Two pieces of scripture have been especially powerful. I took the liberty of including them today as our Old Testament Lesson and Epistle. And perhaps it shouldn't surprise me that when Beverly and I had coffee on Tuesday, it transpired that these exact two pieces of scripture have spoken to her too.

The night before Andrew's funeral, as we received his body here, the Old Testament Lesson at Evensong was from Lamentations, Chapter 3 – where, exiled in Babylon, the author combines a sense of deep grief with great hope. It's a world away from our context, but it just struck me that these two feelings are not contradictory – they so often cohabit – expressed beautifully by Paul in words quoted by Andrew: 'we do not grieve as those without hope' – they are interwoven threads of black and gold.

But then, the morning after the funeral, feeling rather flat and struggling to concentrate during Morning Prayer, it was as if this shaft of light pierced through my brain fog. It was from the New Testament reading that morning – Hebrews Chapter 11 – and I found myself inserting two words: 'Since we are surrounded [by Andrew], and such a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, *looking to Jesus*, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of God'.

*Looking to Jesus*. Isn't that why we're here today? Isn't that why we're here at all? Our stunning Gospel reading is all about looking to Jesus – but it reminds us of how we need to do it through the right lens. Last year I went to the optician for the first time in 30 years. Disappointingly, I was told that I needed glasses for reading. I'm still getting used to them – putting them on to read and taking them off to see long distance – really annoying when leading worship. I've started wondering about bifocals. Some of you may be able to advise. I suspect you have to train yourself to look through the right lens.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Watson, *Maundy: Reflections on Leadership, Identity, Humility, love and Dying*, unpublished (March, 2026)

There's a beautiful bifocal painting of today's Gospel story called *Feast in the House of Simon the Pharisee* by Reubens (dated from about 1620) in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg.<sup>2</sup> It's on the cover of your orders of service. When I look at it, I see the table as the line dividing the two lenses. Above the table, we have Simon and the pharisees looking down on Jesus, dismissively, disdainfully, through the lens of religiosity. Beneath the table, we have the sinful woman, feeling too unworthy to look up at Jesus' face, but gazing on his feet, through the lens of love.

I invite us to approach this table this morning in humble prayer that we might have the eyes of our hearts tested that they are looking in the right direction and through the right lens – both in our discipleship and ministry. For me, one of the most beautiful gifts of the Eucharist – for which we give particular thanks this day as we remember the Last Supper – is ensuring, each week, that I do this. It begins, through penitence, by helping me see my inadequacy and my need for Jesus. It teaches me, through His word, of all that Jesus has done for me. I'm subsequently enabled to approach the table from below as opposed to above. For I can't preside at this table unless I know at the core of my being that I come as one who is deeply unworthy, but by grace ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. It's this that enables me to be a eucharistic person in an entitled world.

And whilst the Eucharist helps to refocus my life, it also helps to refocus my ministry. For those of us who are ordained priests, the calling is not just to preside at the table but to preside over the eucharistic community. The eucharist is a sacrament of our ministry which reminds us of that which is at the heart of our calling as we gather the people of God; as we call them to repent; as we teach them the word; as we remind them of the faith; as we ensure that they are a people of prayer and peace; as we help to strengthen them through the sacraments; as we proclaim blessing over them; as we send them out in the power of the Spirit to live and work to Jesus' praise and glory.

The bishop, of course, presides over the eucharistic community of the diocese and, as I receive this baton from Bishop Andrew – in the midst of the turmoil of the past few months – I've spent some time praying about what the focus of my ministry over the next two years should be. It's a liminal time. It's not a time for the resetting of a major vision or strategy in the diocese. Neither is it time for treading water. But it is a time, as is every time, for laying aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely and running with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. In this context, I shall be holding before us three foci in the next two years.

My first focus will be prayer. And my chief prayer will be *Come Holy Spirit*. It's plastered all over this cathedral dedicated to the Holy Spirit. If you look up outside, it's even on the drainpipes: *veni creator spiritus*. I sometimes tell children that this prayer is at the heart of a bishop's job. 'Confirm O Lord this your child with your Holy Spirit'. Can you remember that being prayed over you? I can. 18 May 19 (well the year doesn't matter!). By the then Archbishop of Wales. 'Confirm O Lord this your servant Richard Paul with your heavenly grace – that he might continue thine forever and **daily** (*shout!*) increase in thy Holy Spirit more and more till he comes to thine everlasting kingdom'. I once shared this story with Andrew who wondered whether he might have been the inspiration behind that bishop on the vicar of Dibley with rising and falling inflections! But it does remind me of the nature of this prayer that we should **daily** increase in the Holy Spirit. More today than yesterday. More tomorrow than today. It's true of the prayer over us at ordination as well as confirmation. This Eucharist of Chrism is largely about calling down the Holy Spirit and re-equipping us to be sent out into the world to minister in its power. This should be the most *chrismatic* or *charismatic* (same word) service in the year. Yes, the priests and deacons will renew their promises – but that's a bit of a new-fangled thing added by Roman Catholics in 1975. The heart of this liturgy has always been consecrating the oil of chrism. The oil that is the sign and symbol of the anointing power of the Holy Spirit. The oil that sends us out to anoint and nurture new disciples, to baptize them, and to heal the sick. There will be more about this after Easter but, for now, I hope *Thy Kingdom Come* can provide a springboard for a renewed commitment to prayer for the Holy Spirit – for unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. Please do take home the free packs which are at the back of the cathedral. Know too that there is anointing and prayer this morning – after the service in the Regimental Chapel.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Paul Reubens, *Feast in the House of Simon of the Pharisee* c. 1618-1620, the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.

My second focus will be pastoral care. I don't underestimate the sense of loss in the diocese, and I will do all I can during this time to love and care for you as our clergy, leaders and staff – in churches, schools and chaplaincies, but also to maintain and raise the culture of pastoral care within the diocese. For me, one of the most moving parts of the ordination service is when the bishop says to those about to be ordained: *'remember with thanksgiving that the treasure now to be entrusted to you is Christ's own flock, bought by the shedding of his blood on the cross. It is to him that you will render account for your stewardship of his people'*. It's one of the best expressions of why safeguarding is so important. But it also requires the fruits of the Spirit. We need to nurture these in order to be entrusted with that treasure: which includes each other. Bishop Andrew and I covenanted ourselves to challenge each other in areas where we fell short of. I want to encourage us to do the same.

And then my third focus will be the priorities that the Bishop's Leadership Team set with Bishop Andrew at our residential in January. We came out of that meeting with a sense that we need to be more focused and less frenetic as a diocese. What is our priority of priorities? When I listen to you - our parishes - speak on this (and it's confirmed through the Church Development Plans) I sense there are two: discipleship (which I believe includes the revitalization of churches) and children and young people. And I sense they're right. Let's keep the main thing the main thing. Do fewer things and do them better. In some respects, identifying these has been a precious gift that Andrew has left us, and I will endeavour to ensure that we remain particularly focused on these that we might provide the strongest platform possible for me to pass on the baton to at the appropriate time.

Sisters and brothers, thank you. Thank you for your renewed yes to God. Thank you for all that you are and do in our parishes, schools and chaplaincies to join in the mission of Jesus to the world. Thank you for all your love and support in the last few months. Let's pledge ourselves anew this day, as Bishop Andrew would have wanted us to, to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. And whatever we do, in word or deed, let's do all in His name, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

So Come Holy Spirit. Amen.

+Paul Dorking  
2 April 2026



Feast in the House of Simon the Pharisee, Peter Paul Rubens, c1620 Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg