

Sermon preached at Emmanuel Church, 15th June 2015

Personal introductions and greetings.

In the last few days I have visited many places. I have been to Bamenda and Mbegwi. On the Episcopal Visitation I have moved with the Bishop to Mbanga and Kotto. Now I am with you at Emmanuel Church and I praise God for being here. I praise God that you are here also.

In Bamenda I moved to see the new church to replace All Saints. It is a mighty church and a worthy house of God. God has richly blessed the Anglican Church in Bamenda.

In Mbegwi I visited the church of St Mark. This church was built by money my parish raised in England. It is a great personal joy to see that it flourishes.

At St. George's Mbanga, an outstation of this church there were 4 candidates being confirmed and a faithful congregation was there to support them. When I was last at St George's I baptized the second child of the Evangelist who was there. The church has been improved since then and next the plaster will be painted. More importantly the congregation is in good strong health.

At St Saviour's Kotto there is a wonderful church paid for by one person - a man of faith and commitment. The church is the only building that has electricity. There are plans to build a school and a clinic and the land has been purchased.

Why am I telling you this? some of you will know all this already. There is a reason I am telling you. It is because every time I travel back to Cameroon from England I see evidence of a growing and strong Anglican Church in Cameroon. I know you have many challenges. Sometimes those challenges will feel like a heavy burden. Sometimes the burden will feel so heavy that you are unable to see what big steps you are taking in faith. Only the report of a visitor can really encourage you, because the visitor can make comparisons.

I am a grandfather. My little grand-daughter lives a long way away from us in England so my wife and I only see her from time to time. Her parents see her every day so they do not always see how she is growing up. When I see her she has grown so much each time.

So it is with a visitor to the Anglican Church in Cameroon. I feel very encouraged that you are growing like vigorous plants. I rejoice that you are seeing the fruits of your prayer, your faith, and your persistence. Keep going. Don't lose heart. Keep pushing forward. God is good, and he will provide.

The gospel reading this morning has something to say about this (Mark 4 26-34). It tells of seeds that are planted in the ground. The seeds grow into strong plants and then can be harvested. The man who sows the seeds can be wide awake going about his daily business; or he can be lying flat out on his bed fast asleep. Whether he is awake or asleep the plant is growing. It just happens because this is how God has created it to be.

My friends, as I have travelled around Cameroon, I have noticed how fertile your land is. Everywhere it is green. Maybe this is why your national football team wears green. It is reflected also in your diocesan badge. Whether you are awake or asleep Cameroon is a green and fertile land. This is how it is with the Anglican Church in Cameroon. One person plants. Another person waters. But it is God who gives the growth. God is growing the Anglican Church in this land.

There is an abundance of faith. There is an abundance of hope. There is an abundance of love. Because of this there is an abundance of blessings. Jesus came that we might have life, and have it abundantly. We are called to live that abundant life together as his church so that we are bursting with faith. Our joy should be overflowing like a fountain of water, or a cup of overflowing wine.

The abundance of this new life overflows into the life of those who will be confirmed in our service today. Their lives are touched by God. Their lives are being formed by your life together as a church. The bishop is the one who administers this sacrament. You all must help to be the family of these 19 people. So the bishop plays his part. You play your part. But it is God, and God alone who gives the grace for these people to come to faith and live as Christians.

God has big plans for each of you. He has a programme, and it will be revealed as you take each step of faith. Expect big things to happen in your life after today. You will be anointed. You will be blessed. He will call you, guide you and lead you if you place your trust in him. Do not hide from him, and do not hide your light under a bushel, for you are called to be the light and the salt for the world.

Today God says to you, you are precious in my sight, and he will lift up his countenance upon you. Not only are you precious but your confirmation today changes the church for ever. Have thought about that? Each one of you being confirmed changes the whole church of Christ. There are 2 billion Christians in the world, but by being confirmed today that makes it 2 billion and 19. You have changed the whole of Christ's church for ever, right here in Emmanuel Church.

St. Mark's gospel also tells us about the tiny mustard seed, which grows into a huge plant. I tell you today that each of you, and this whole Emmanuel church will grow into something really great within the Anglican Church in Cameroon.

As I fly back to England on Tuesday night, please keep me in your prayers. I pray for your Bishop and his wife every day back in England. I pray for your diocese every day. Please pray for me, for we have many challenges in Europe, and we need to pray that Europe will come to faith as it once did. I pray for travel mercies for my moving.

May God bless you all. Amen.