**When the Archbishop came to Pray**

In the scheme of things, it was a good day for summer 2024. There were only a few drops of light rain, which was a triumph given that it has been such a miserable, cold and wet year. I hadn’t prayed about the weather; I have never had any success praying for good weather. Perhaps this is because prayer isn’t primarily about getting what we want but rather about cooperating with the Lord; connecting with Him; and knowing his love. When he arrived in Bath and Wells the Archbishop said, "Prayer is the moment in which we recognise that whoever we are, and whatever we are like, we are reached out to by God. And we look into His eyes and know that we are loved."

It was September 7th. The Archbishop’s visit was part of a wave of prayer across the Diocese. He prayed with young people and young adults on the Friday evening in Bath as he joined *Movement* – a dynamic ministry that leads worship events for young people, disciples them and trains them in leadership. First thing Saturday morning he visited *Junction 24*, the cattle market where he prayed and worshipped with the rural community, and heard stories of rural isolation and the difficulties of the farming life. He went on to see the work of St Francis Church, a parish in a deprived area of Bridgewater; and then Nailsea school engaging with prayer stations there. He finished his visit by coming to Frome to visit The Giant’s Garden, the site of the developing Mary’s House Community and Frome’s newly completed Prayer Shed. It seemed odd – and an enormous privilege – to have a Christian leader of international importance come to visit our quirky town and engage with our projects.

The Giant’s Garden is now entering its third year. The Archbishop came, sporting wellies which one of his team had brought along for him. He spoke passionately of the impact of climate change on more vulnerable communities across the world – sharing stories from colleagues in places such as Kenya and Panama. He spoke of the biblical imperative for us in the West to take our part in tackling this crisis and prayed for us in our response. He shared that he had insisted that the current renovations at Lambeth Palace included work to make that ancient building carbon neutral. The Archbishop planted a vine – which he insisted on calling a tree! We were very grateful to the two young adults who helped to make sure the vine was well planted, trodden in and watered. The Archbishop blessed the vine and promised – in jest I think – to ‘curse the fig tree’ that Bishop Michael had planted last September if it did better than his vine: the competition is on! He discussed the intricacies of greenhouse glazing with another young adult and helped himself to a tomato from the plant. It was a delight to have Issie Leathley share a couple of Christian songs that she had written herself.

Following this Liz Dudley, Vicar of St Mary’s, talked to the Archbishop about the developing Mary’s House Community and showed him the building. They discussed contemplative prayer, dialogue and reconciliation and care for the created world. Although time was tight – cancelled trains etc – the Archbishop didn’t miss the chance enthusiastically to sample tea and scones on the best china. What a spread it was!

He finished his visit with the most important thing – prayer. The Archbishop completed the first ever 24 hours of prayer in the new Frome Prayer Shed. This beautiful prayer room is a restored gardener’s shed on the site of St Mary’s Church. But don’t be mistaken – this is a Prayer Shed for all the people of Frome and it is consecrated not just by the Archbishop but by the prayers of all those who step inside and pray. It is our hope that this room will develop to be a 24-7 prayer room – a space where people pray every hour of every day, passing the batten to the next person like a relay race. Our expectation is that as this wave of prayer builds the town and surrounding villages of Frome will experience the presence and transforming love of the Lord Jesus in a way that is beyond our imagination.

Having an Archbishop come to pray is a lot of work – but he prayed and was delightful, and encouraging.

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