

Presidential Address: 6th June 2026

On March 6 2007, shortly before tea, I discovered I was in danger of becoming a compulsive liar. I had come home just before tea, and my wife Rachel asked me why I had not come a little earlier to help with the kids, in that tone that hinted at a postscript “as I have asked you a 100 times”. My mouth started moving before she finished her sentence – words came out – explaining I had been busy and, after all, was back in time for tea. Hmm, well yes Mike that was true, but with a spin an Olympic skater would have been proud of. I had been busy – down at the gym since 4pm after work.

What had I just done? I had disliked implied criticism, reacted with defensive self-justification, and followed my inner lawyer to produce an excuse, i.e. “busyness” which by the letter of the law was accurate. BUT I had deceived so quickly and easily that my wife and I both believed me. Since which time I have confessed my duplicity, but I fear I am not alone in being tempted to allow truth a holiday.

Deceit is all around. In public life our confidence in people telling the truth is at a pretty low ebb; we are beset by disinformation, masked by confident self-assertion, grand-standing and attractive rhetoric; all wrapped up with an easy disregard for whether things are true. Even being found out to have “mis-spoken” appears to carry no moral censure or public infamy; just make sure you have a list of excuses, self-justifications and other tactics to hand.

And Christians are not exempt. We are in danger of being like that girl in Sunday school who when asked what lying was said, “It is an abomination to the Lord and a very present help in trouble”. We keep the back door open. Jesus challenges us – let your yes be yes and your no be no, I am the way, the truth and the life ... we are in danger of cutting ourselves off from the fount of our life by our deceit and falsehoods, by our petty need to avoid blame, not offend, have an easy ride etc. Gaining such things we are in danger of losing much more, being distanced from what is truly important... And St Paul echoes this in Colossians 3.9, “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off your old self with its ways”.

Why do I mention all this? Well at the House of Bishops a couple of weeks ago we were looking at the issue of trust and there is a paper coming to General Synod in July about trust, its demise and the prospects for its revival, whether institutionally or personally. And it’s related to truth, our readiness and willingness to speak truth and live truth with one another. Interestingly, the research on all sorts of organisations for decades is for once pretty consistent – that there are four factors that really influence trust.

But before I get to that we should note how trust and faith are so close to one another. Indeed, in John’s Gospel Jesus does not use noun *pistis*, only the verb *pisteuo*, faith is an active thing, a doing thing. Belief is acting as if it’s so. *Faith is relying on something as*

if it were so. It means you are prepared without thinking to act as if it were so. You are all demonstrating faith right now - faith in your chairs. If you didn't have faith in those chairs, would you be sitting there like that? That's faith. That's what reliance is.

Faith is a confidence that leads you to interact with reality in such a way that a result comes. When I have faith, and lean into the microphone, my voice isn't amplified because I have this thing called faith inside me. The amplification happens because my faith led me to act, and my action tied into a power, a reality, and that brought a result.

That's faith for you, trust leading you to act and be put in touch with a power that brings about a result. Jesus demonstrates this faith all the time on the gospels. And Jesus is clear that this faith is a growing thing – it's like a mustard seed initially, but it grows as we realise more and more we are connecting with an interactive God.

SO four factors that really influence trust, and these apply not only to our relationships with one another but with God too.

First, trust depends on predictability. If Bishop James is all smiles and cuddles today and tomorrow at Cathedral Evensong completely blanks me, then unless it's because Bolton got promotion and Plymouth didn't, then I'm not going to be inclined to trust. So too where faith in God is concerned – if our understanding of God is like the pagan gods of old who were desperately unpredictable, in need of appeasing and even then were capricious, then our faith, our trust, is going to have a pretty low ceiling. If on the other hand our God is One who is faithful despite our faithlessness, who is slow to anger but rich in mercy, who like the Father of the Prodigal Son is concerned to welcome, heal and unite with us... and stable and predictable in such characteristics – well we're going to trust more. Predictability.

Second, not only predictable, but able. We might find a dentist, car mechanic or maths teacher affable, engaging and humorous, but if they can't fill a tooth without clumsily damaging another, if they put diesel in our lead free car or can't differentiate to save their life, we're not going to trust them. They've got to be able. So too, faith depends on appreciating God is able, able for example to take any situation forward as we relate and engage with this God. That, I take it, is one aspect of what Paul is talking about in Romans 8.28 when he writes, "**all** things work for the good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose".

Third, integrity is vital for trust according to the research. That words and deeds are aligned. Nothing dissipates trust quicker than realising someone isn't sincere, isn't genuine, isn't truthful. Of course, this is a constant challenge for us as Christians – and we know how we fall short, not least in relation to our baptismal promises, confirmation affirmations, marriage vows, ministerial commitments. But in all of these commitments what we are committing to is doing our level best to keep these promises in the power of

the Holy Spirit, and when we fall short, as we do, to acknowledge, admit and repent, aware that our forgiving God is with us, stooping to dust us down, pick us up and get us going again. For us as Christians integrity is both about striving to be aligned in word and deed, AND about confession, repentance and forgiveness when we fall short. Hence beginning this address with a confession.

Fourth, and finally, benevolence - is this person acting selfishly or for the sake of others, does this person have my interests at heart or just their own? The cross is, of course, the distillation of the Christian God's benevolence towards us, dying to bring us home to His life.

So four characteristics of trust – benevolence, integrity, ability and predictability. We rejoice in a God whose character is replete with these qualities, and I would suggest we must continually strive to embody them ourselves, for the sake of our own discipleship, for the health of the Body of Christ and for our witness to the world.