

**Third Sunday of Epiphany 2016 Evensong**  
**Dispatches from the Archbishop's Pilgrimage**

I thought that rather than have a proper sermon on Numbers and 1 Corinthians this evening we'd have a bit of a cheat and instead have dispatches from the Archbishop of York's pilgrimage to Bridlington this week.

Just to bring everybody up to speed, this is what I'm talking about. The Archbishop of York is our Bishop. As well as being one of the two Primates of the Church of England and the Archbishop of its northern province, the Archbishop is the bishop of the Diocese of York; and we are part of the diocese of York. So he's our bishop.

From the beginning of Advent last – so that's the end of November – through to Trinity Sunday in May of this year the Archbishop has totally struck out his diary and has committed those six months to spending

a week on pilgrimage in each deanery of the diocese of York. And this last week he has been in the Bridlington Deanery – so that's the town of Bridlington, all the villages on the Flamborough headland and all the villages out over the Wolds like Kilham and Rudston and Wold Newton and what not.

During the course of this last week the Archbishop has been staying in the Priory's parish, in the home of our own Pat Whitehead. I know they've had a whale of a time and I'll leave it to Pat to dish the dirt about that. The Archbishop has also had with him the Revd Canon Joanna Udal, a very senior Anglican cleric who, among other things has been the Lambeth Secretary for Anglican Communion Affairs, but is now awaiting a visa to allow her to join a religious community in Algiers. She stayed half the week in Rudston and half the week in our parish, staying in the home of our own Betty Cousins. I know, again, they've had a whale of a time.

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

This has been a pilgrimage of prayer, witness and blessing, so all the shenanigans of the previous week of the Primates' meeting at Canterbury weren't really what it was all about. There was a question and answer session at Christ Church on Thursday evening and inevitably the question of the Episcopal Church of the United States being suspended from the Anglican Communion came up. I suppose one could expect no more than that the Archbishop would toe the party line and deny that any sanctions has been applied to the Episcopal Church: they were simply experiencing the consequences of a unilateral departure from Anglican doctrine by introducing liturgies to bless same sex relationships. And if you find that semantic distinction unconvincing, you'll be even more baffled by the Archbishop explaining it was just a bit like them being sent to the sin bin for three years! Those are the actual words he used.

But that wasn't what this week has been about. It was about prayer, witness and blessing. The Archbishop

has been keen to help people to pray. He was trying to get folk not to worry that they find it hard to pray: everybody does. Just say the Lord's Prayer. It's what Jesus taught us to pray and it says, succinctly, everything we need to say to God. He was giving out prayer beads: a cross, three small beads, one big bead, three small beads, one big bead, three small beads, one big bead, three small beads and back to the cross. Even if you didn't get a set of prayer beads, you can imagine holding them to help you pray. Hold the cross and say a prayer of adoration: I adore you, O Christ and I bless you; by your Holy Cross, you have saved me; and you have redeemed the world. Then, feel each of the three small beads in turn as you say Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy; and feel the big bead as you say the Lord's prayer. Carry on doing that round the chain until you get back to the cross and say the prayer of adoration, and you have prayed the Lord's Prayer three times and prayed everything there is to pray.

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

The Archbishop has certainly blessed whole swathes of Bridlington as he has walked from place to place and called in on all sorts of people and projects: the Spa, the Lifeboat, the harbour, the new Leisure World development, the Rugby Club, the Hinge Project, the Priory's Coffee Mates, Brigham's Funeral Directors, a marine life teaching centre at South Landing, a farm in Rudston and so and so and so on and countless people and shops he's bumped into on the way.

And as he's been doing this, the Archbishop has been witnessing to the Gospel and encouraging all he met to be more confident in expressing their faith. And what has really struck me is how well he has been received. We hear time and time again that Christendom is dead, that we live in a post-Christian country. And I wondered whether anybody would even recognise the Archbishop, let alone show any interest in him. Yet time and time again people have flocked to him as if he was royalty. They've welcomed his attention . . .

and they've welcomed his prayer and uncompromising proclamation of the Gospel.

When we were at the Rugby Club yesterday, watching the match and then getting stuck in the bar afterwards, as you do, exercising our pastoral ministry; and the Archbishop, who's played quite a lot of rugby at scrum half was commenting very knowledgably on the game whilst I blagged it and tried not to betray my ignorance; people were expressing to me how honoured they were that he was interested in visiting their club and speaking to them.

The Archbishop is 68 years old. During this week he has displayed remarkable physical stamina; and tomorrow evening will be beginning to do it all over again in the Scarborough Deanery. He undoubtedly has really been blessing to the community of Bridlington during this last week. And he has been a fillip to the missionary confidence to the churches with whom he has been on pilgrimage this week. Amen.