

St Edmundsbury Cathedral



Festal Eucharist on Christmas Day
25 DECEMBER 2025
St Edmundsbury Cathedral
Sermon by the Very Reverend Joe Hawes

I'm not a parent, but I know a few.

One thing they tell me about how to hold a baby is that it takes a combination of confidence and tenderness. And a good balance of both.

So I thought that confidence and tenderness might be a good starting point for this morning. Its a strange thing, but the fact that the world feels like a darker and more dangerous place Actually fills me with confidence and hope in my vocation as a Christian.

It's as if the Church might just be beginning to ions its voice again.

We've had a century of decline, endless debates about our identity, questioning our place in the world, post Christendom, post colonialism, taking hesitant argumentative steps (if a step can be described as argumentative) towards greater inclusion.

But now, well I sense, in the face of the resurgence of rhetorics of hate and division around the world.

The rise of nationalism, narratives of exclusion, raised populist voices telling us who to hate, who to be frightened of... I sense a Church worldwide, finding its voice again, even perhaps recovering a sense of its core purpose.

Maybe I'm speaking too soon. Maybe the Quiet Revival which is seeing a modest upswell of younger people starting to attend churches, in search it seems of serious purpose and focus, maybe it will turn out to be a temporary blip...

But the prevailing secular narrative of the extinction of Christianity seems perhaps to be a little premature.

And I think the genius of it, the part that makes me hope that it is authentic. Is that its a Church in resistance, not in dominance, a Church speaking more from the margins.

Asking: 'what kind of world do you want to live in? What kind of society? Who is to belong, and who would you exclude? And are we to continue to live as if there were no tomorrow for our world, and the widening gap between rich and poor doesn't matter?

And, letting go of our dominance paradoxically can give us confidence.

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To speak to a world which feels, to be frank, very far from The Kingdom which the newborn baby will grow up to proclaim, live and die for. To say, with humility, but with absolute certainty that we think that The Kingdom He had in mind was a very different place.

Festivals at which the poor man
Is king and the consumptive is
Healed; mirrors in which the blind look
At themselves and love looks at them
Back; and industry is for mending
The bent bones and the minds fractured
By life.

But, and here's the thing, and back to the holding-the-baby-analogy: this confidence is not a bullying sort of boldness, not hectoring, or controlling, but born only of tenderness. The kind of tenderness with which we instinctively hold the newborn, and with which we believe, God holds and views you and me, wherever we find ourselves on the faith or no faith journey, however far we feel we've strayed, however much our lives feels muddled and compromised.

Absolute tenderness. That is where God starts with us, asks us to start with God, newborn in a manger, and crucially, asks us to start with each other and with ourselves.

I'm all too aware of the hatred in my own heart, the dark thoughts I harbour about those in power, in Washington, and Moscow, the frightened men who fight for and cling on to and are sustained by their own innate insecurity or narcissism. The King Herods of today. But I know that ultimately, that hatred is of no use, and indeed does the opposite of the vision the Son of Man came to ask us to follow. For hard though I might find it to admit, they too are loved by a love so outrageous, so all encompassing it can gather even them in...as well as you and me.

Which doesn't mean that their weapons and hatreds are welcome at the crib. We are confident in that. But they are welcome, and so are we, and all of God's child. To hold the child with tenderness and confidence,

And in little, daily ways, to make a world fit to receive him. With confidence and tenderness.

Amen