

**Sermon at the opening service of DRAE Assembly at Kongshaug, Norway.
Deacon AnnWren, UK representative on DRAE Executive.**

I speak in the name of God, our Creator,our Redeemer and our Sustainer. Amen

God is good !

Congregation: "All of the time!"

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I first learnt this proclamation from Sister Elie, sharing something of her worship in her homeland of Tanzania at a DRAE meeting. In sharing this proclamation I experienced something of the joy of her community and since then have been able to share this with some of my own congregations in England. And this is one purpose of this Assembly to come close to one another and to share insights and experiences from our many and diverse situations, and more importantly to know God is close to us, the Creator of Heaven and Earth.



In Genesis. 1, we hear:

God created the Heaven and the Earth as one, each with defined purpose and boundaries. Heaven created as God's dwelling place, close to the Earth and the creation he loves and continues to create anew.

God is good!.....

Eventually, Heaven was too far away and God came to Earth in human flesh, to be close within our human experience, close... At one with our every breathe.....

At a recent Assembly of Scottish deacons I shared in a beautiful prayer service when the deacon led us, just using our breathing to invoke the ancient name of God "I am"

The name first spoken by God to Moses from the burning bush.(Ex.3:14) At the Scottish gathering we gently breathed in to "I" , held our breathe for a moment and then slowly breathed out to "am". He asked us to listen to our breathing, a gentle in take and a harder out breathing and it sounds like the actual words. So the prayer brought us together Shall we try this now.....I..... Am..... So we invoke God by our every breathe.....even when we do not think of our breathing or even do not think of God through our business. God is close.

Today we have with us our World President Sandy Boyce, and this reminds us of the great links we have with our brothers and sisters across the whole World, again each with their own prayerful expressions.

At a World Assembly of deacons in America I learnt a short song "God is here today, as certain as the air I breathe, as certain as the morning sun has risen, as certain as when I sing you'll here my song." (Sung) The person leading worship had collected worship songs from across the world and this one came from South America. First discovered on a shore, sung by fisherfolk as they mended their nets after a night of fishing on the open ocean. The sun had risen, all was good. However, further exploration of the song found that it was first sung in a S.American political prison by prisoners kept in isolation in windowless restrictive cells. Every morning, while they had breathe they sang out in the darkness their song of God's goodness. United in a common purpose to affirm God's presence among them.

In Mark's Gospel we receive two clear icons of Jesus. The first, Jesus resting in God, assured of God's presence and second his authority and powerful words to still the storm. Both speaking in different ways of Jesus' words in John's Gospel, "The Father and I are one" John 17.. One with the Creator of Heaven and Earth. The disciples first frightened and as often is the case, this soon turns to anger but as Jesus stills the storm their response becomes one of awe and wonder. "Who is this?"

In his ministry Jesus seems to move from one human storm to another, so often he is surrounded by angry people..... Picture any one of these situations in your mindat the centre of the crowd and so often with him there is another individual experiencing their own spiritual distress.....the woman caught in the act of adultery, the demoniac, the man with the withered arm, the untouchable the leper, the bleeding woman..... Jesus focuses not on the storm around him but on the person he seeks to restore to their rightful place in community. Sometimes there is a quiet conversation or question " Do you want to be healed ?another time a silent action.... He writes in the sand..... What does Jesus write to send the crowds away? Another time Jesus challenges and can be angry ... With money changers and Pharisees. The purpose is the same, to open the door of opportunity, a gateway to Heaven seeking to transform first the individual, then to change their communities and through them change the World. Jesus is living out the prayer he taught the disciples, "Your Kingdom come on Earth as it is in heaven." Belief in Heaven is the ultimate rebellion against accepting the World as it is.

In my own country there is a return to the Celtic tradition of prayer and those of you who came to the Assembly at Durham will have experienced this tradition of these very early Christians living on the boundaries of Sea and sky. In this tradition the experience of coming close to God, close to Jesus in a transforming insight are called "thin places" when God , Heaven and Earth are one, close as breathing. Such an occasion may come in a beautiful place, such as this at Kongshaug or in a gentle word or action or in a daily task suddenly transfigured with new meaning.

We come to this Assembly from some tough and demanding places in our World, places where God's presence is less easily seen or obviously felt. These are called "thick places" by the Celts. here in this Assembly we are called to share our stories, the truth of what it is like to be in these "thick" difficult places, our failures but also our inspiring stories of being people of transformation..... The experience of becoming that "thin place" among people in the storms of life.....in those places we can experience life transfigured by God's way of love, compassion and justice.

Jesus taught us to pray to God "Your Kingdom come on Earth as it is in Heaven". Jesus lived out this prayer and I believe this is a strong icon of our community of DIAKONIA..... We

have travelled here from diverse situations.... We will bring fears, uncertainties, anger (just like the disciples in the boat) even our Associations, our Institutions and our Churches may be living with uncertainty and change. But here in this Assembly we will pray the Lord's Prayer together, in our any different languages, the one prayer, "Your Kingdom come on Earth as it is in Heaven".

When Jesus suffered and died, he opened the Kingdom to all people....NO EXCEPTIONS! This is challenging!!! When Jesus breathed his final prayer, "I am", his final breathe.... (Pause) there was silence (pause)..... And into that silence stepped an outsider, a centurion, perhaps with dried blood on his hands and into that silence surrounded by spiritual distress, and sights of physical violence and bloody horror... Into that silence came the words of insight and quiet proclamation, "Truly this man was a Son of God!" Lk. 23:47

(quietly) **God is good.....**

So, here in this beautiful place we come to rest awhile in God , in one another, and breathe in God's sustaining Spirit, his life giving Spirit of Pentecost.....

We are the people of Christ's Resurrection, transforming people.....servants of the Lord of Heaven and Earth and at one with God's purpose to create a new Heaven and a New Earth (Rev. 21) Offer our every breathe as a quiet invocation, "Iam.....", or in the joyful proclamation,

**"God is good ! All of the time! All of the time! God is good!"
(Congregation join in and respond)**