

Bishop Hugh's installation service sermon: 17 January 2026

Luke 24:13-33

The first thing that I want to say to you all, is a huge thank you:

- thank you to everyone who has welcomed us so generously to this wonderful diocese;
- thank you to everyone who has made this service happen, and the hospitality afterwards;
- thank you to friends and family, to all of you who have loved us through many changes;
- thank you to all of you who have come from near and far to celebrate this moment in the long and faithful life of Worcester Diocese - and especially to Bishop Godfrey from the Diocese of Morogoro in Tanzania, Bishop Bettina from Magdeburg in Germany, and Bishop Viktor who has come from the Diocese of Peru;
- and to Bishop Martin, thank you for your wise and loving leadership of the Diocese these past 18 months, I am so grateful to you - and to you all.

'Kingdom People' it says, in big letters, on the front of your Order of Service.

It's the summary of the Diocese's vision, and so 'Kingdom People' are two words I have been living with for many months now.

I wonder what those two words mean to you? - 'Kingdom People'?

It's one of the questions that I'll be asking as I travel around the diocese and get to know you and the communities you serve. What does it mean for *you* to be Kingdom People?

Jesus talks about the Kingdom a lot - not as a faraway place, off beyond the clouds somewhere, but as something that is *happening*, right here, around us - close enough for us to reach out and touch.

And he tells stories about the Kingdom to help us understand what he means - how the Kingdom is like a Mustard Seed that starts small and grows to become a great hospitable tree, home to birds of every kind; and it's like hidden yeast mixed with flour that, mysteriously and wonderfully, grows to become bread.

And he tells us how precious the Kingdom is - it's like a pearl of such beauty and value that it's worth trading everything you own to hold in your hand.

He shows us what it's like - it's a child placed at the heart of things. It's a party with all the wrong people invited. It's a shamed son or daughter being given a new start.

And he makes the Kingdom happen wherever he goes, by calling out injustice, by healing people, by forgiving them and turning their lives round when they've got things wrong.

When Jesus talks about the 'Kingdom', what he means is: *'how things are when they're the way God wants them to be.'*

And he lived and died and lived again to show us exactly *'how things are when they're the way God wants them to be.'*

And I think 'Kingdom People' is shorthand for all of that; it's a description of all who are seeking to be and to become, *'how things are when they're the way God wants them to be'*.

And I think that's what church is, and I think that's what church is for. Church is a community that's learning to live out *'how things are when they're the way God wants them to be'* in our villages, towns and cities, in the middle of the muddle of life, with all its ups and all its downs.

And that means we're called to be communities that aren't anxious about being small or fragile, because we know God does miraculous things with yeast and tiny mustard seeds.

It means being communities that point - in all that we say and everything we do; in prayer and worship, in our culture and our way of life - towards God's grace and mercy and overwhelming, generous love.

It means being communities that offer a radical welcome and a safe home to everyone - especially the most vulnerable, people who've been hurt, left out or cast aside.

And when we get that wrong, it means being transparent and honest about it, and changing how we do things, so that church can be safe for everyone.

Kingdom communities know that our children and young people need to be at the heart of things, because that's where Jesus put them.

Kingdom communities exist for the sake of the world, and not for our own benefit or comfort.

Kingdom communities are called to live with hope in every moment - when things are going great, and when they really aren't.

And the world desperately needs communities like that. This country, our beautiful, creative, divided nation - needs communities of hope, which point people towards the kingdom and invite them to join in - as much today as ever.

In the story from Luke's gospel that we heard a minute ago, we meet two disciples who have lost hope and are struggling to go on. And I imagine we've all been those disciples, at one point or another - it may be that some of you are in that situation right now.

And then Jesus shows up, and his presence, closer than they could have imagined, changes their lives. The world around them hasn't changed of course; their circumstances are the same as before, but everything is different because, in Jesus, the kingdom has come close.

And because the kingdom has come so close, the story finishes with them setting off to start the life-changing, world-changing work which connects them directly to us. Kingdom people passing on the good news, down the generations, and around the world, here to us in this place and this time.

Because Kingdom hope isn't based on the state of the nation or the actions of powerful people. It isn't determined by whether things are going well or it's all falling apart. It isn't, thank God, defined by whether the church gets things right or wrong. Real hope, kingdom hope, is based entirely and completely on God's presence with us, wherever we are and whatever is going on.

And Church is the community where we get to practise living that hope; where we learn to look for Jesus and the kingdom hope that he brings, and where we're invited to give ourselves, our time and talents, to making the kingdom happen; church is where we learn together to be and to become 'Kingdom People'.

So, as I begin my ministry here with you all today, I need to say one more thank you.

Thank you to all of you 'Kingdom People' here in Dudley and Worcestershire who are working with and for hope; thank you to all you Kingdom People who are faithfully serving your communities, walking with those who are suffering, and pointing to Jesus; to all of you who, walking with Jesus, have discovered that the Kingdom is here, and that we find it best together.

It is the greatest of privileges to join you in the unfolding story of this great Diocese as your bishop, on our journey together to be and to become God's Kingdom People, for the communities we serve and for this generation.

Amen