Installation Sermon

The Very Revd Ian Black

[Newport Cathedral](http://www.newportcathedral.org.uk/)

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Fans of BBC Radio 4’s ‘New Quiz’ will know its theme tune well. Taken from Leroy Anderson’s fun and imaginative ‘[The Typewriter](https://youtu.be/g2LJ1i7222c)’, where the sound of a typing pool provides percussion for the fast-paced melody. There is a 21st century version which uses a computer printer, sampling the sound it makes as the basis for the track. Driving back from Kent to our then home in Leeds some years ago, with a van of stuff having cleared out my father-in-law’s house, this came on the radio during the early hours of the night. Sadly the copyright challenges for online streaming mean I can’t play it. I’ll post the link online later instead.

It’s by drum and bass DJ James Pullen, under the stage name of Mistabishi, it’s called ‘[Printer Jam](https://youtu.be/Xf4HQolWOmE)’. And as you can imagine, that is precisely what happens, the printer jams. There is a voice-over which utters the now infuriatingly familiar phrase ‘try turning it off and on again’. The system needs a reboot so that the software can work as it is intended; to clear the glitch.

Many people have looked at this past year and a bit, and decided that what we now need is a reboot, so much has been disrupted. A reboot is a chance to take a fresh look at who we are, where we are and how we are. The fairtrade movement has picked up on the UK Government’s slogan ‘Build Back Better’ with ‘Build Back Fairer’. Pressing reset does not mean going back to exactly how it was, otherwise why press reboot. The Financial Times had a piece last weekend on how the wealth of billionaires has increased over the past two decades, not least due to the money poured into the financial system evaporating up rather than trickling down (‘[The billionaire boom](https://www.ft.com/content/747a76dd-f018-4d0d-a9f3-4069bf2f5a93)’, FT 15th May 2021). Build back fairer, pressing reboot, brings some challenging questions to the fore.

Churches are no different in needing to reboot and cathedrals are at heart churches. We know the challenges so well. And this past week I’ve been dropping in on the Edward Cadbury Lectures at Birmingham University – the wonder of Zoom is I can do this from the comfort of my new study. These have been given by Linda Woodhead, from Lancaster University. She is particularly clued up on what she calls the ‘nones’, those who describe themselves as ‘no religion’ in surveys. And of course, when we look at the under 25s they are the largest group. The theme of her lectures was about how values have become the new religion, values and value statements are everywhere. In the words of the pop star Rihanna, the aim is to ‘live your life’ and this is judged by the values you live by. If we are to connect with the ‘nones’, those who declare that they have ‘no religion’, this has to be the starting point for any reboot. Our message needs to talk and show in practice the language of values. The message, the good news of Jesus Christ, which this cathedral stands to proclaim, will not be heard in our society outside of this ethic.

So what are we going to do with our reboot? This is a holy site, founded on a vision. The story is of Gwynllyw, St Woolos, with his vision of a white ox with a black spot on its forehead. Where he found it, he was to build his church and according to the story, this is where he found it. Who knows if it is true, or mythical? The ox can be associated with repentance and a new start, so perhaps a white ox with a black spot is a call to reboot, to restart, to be focused on what truly matters and Gwynllyw lived a changed life. That’s why I chose the first reading with Jacob’s vision of angels ascending and descending, of the presence of God blessing and bringing the assurance of hope to be trusted and embraced.

We have a story of faith which inspires our values. If it doesn’t, then we have a much bigger problem and scandals shake to the foundations because they reveal a gap in our integrity and therefore credibility. Interestingly, though, Linda Woodhead in her lectures, pointed to how there is a still a strong appeal for the gospel of Jesus Christ and the values that flow from him. This has somehow become separated from the growing secularisation. So I think the picture is much more complicated than it is often portrayed to be. ‘None’ or ‘no religion’ does not necessarily mean atheist. Values being at the forefront is a language we can engage with, and it demands we up our game.

At the end of this service, I have included an affirmation of some powerful values which we aim to reflect in our mission and ministry going forward to serve this city, diocese and all who look with goodwill towards justice and peace, the flourishing of all creation and lives of love and hope. These reflect our core values and the faith that shapes these. They are built on the story of hope – God in Jesus Christ calls us to be people of faith, who love our neighbour and seek to serve with love and joy, who work for justice and the integrity of creation.

When we look at a reboot as an opportunity to look at who we are, where are and how we are, our foundation is built on a vision of God’s presence blessing and assuring. ‘Who we are’ is beloved and called by God in Jesus Christ to be his agents of faith, hope and love. ‘Where we are’ is standing on the threshold of a renewed beginning, where we are being challenged to not just build back, but build back fairer. ‘How we are’, well let’s take time to ask one another that one. This has been a tough year and some will be stressed beyond measure, some grieving the deepest loss, some battered in faith and confidence. To this comes the Christ of the icon on the front cover of the service booklet, which is situated in The St Mary Chapel at the west end of this cathedral, taking the burdens for, not so much rest as relief and renewal.

Tomorrow is the feast of Pentecost. The gift of the Holy Spirit is our power-pack for all that lies ahead. It is a healing pack, if that is needed. It is a strengthening pack to face the challenges, of which there are many. It is an inspiring pack to give fresh vision and renewed confidence. The vision 1500 years ago was of a call from God for a new, refocused start. Values call us to live what we proclaim, for the story of faith to make a difference in us and through us.

This sacred site has been for 1500 years a place of prayer, sacrament and loving service shining as a beacon for all. It is a privilege and honour to have been installed as its Dean. May God bless us all as we dedicated ourselves anew to a vision which will inspire our values that we may be faithful witnesses in our generation to the good news of God in Jesus Christ, and bear that light in the world.

Installation Sermon as Dean of Newport, [*Newport Cathedral*](http://www.newportcathedral.org.uk/), Saturday 22nd May 2021