

**Anglican-Lutheran Society  
Annual Meeting 2026**

**Sermon by the Rev Dr Anders Bergquist (Vicar of St John's Wood Church)**

It was in 2016 I found myself in Uppsala. I had been invited to join people from the Liturgical Commission of the Porvoo Communion to meet our Swedish friends who were in the process of revising their public prayers. In fact the Eucharist we celebrate this morning is the fruit of that revision. We had been asked to comment, and what stuck in my mind was a comment by a Finnish colleague who had worked through the material very thoroughly before the meeting and had tabulated how many texts there were in which Jesus or God the Father were presented as being close to us, accompanying us on our journey, a friendly arm



*The Rev Kristina Andréasson (celebrant) and Dr Bergquist (preacher)*

around the shoulder, as opposed to the number of texts in which they were presented as judge. Strikingly, between the previous rite and what was in front of us there was a significant reduction in the texts that spoke of judgement and a tremendous increase in those that spoke of the friendliness and the compassion of God.

It was a very interesting observation but, as I reflected on it, I wondered are they not fundamentally the same thing – the nearness and the judgement? This is something you see in Jesus' encounters with people in the Gospels. He comes near to them; he welcomes them; he accepts them as they are and where they are. In it is this acceptance, this nearness that provokes the change of life in them – metanoia, conversion of life. A classic instance is Zacchaeus, up in his sycamore tree, trying to get a better view of Jesus entering the town. Jesus was not saying, 'Zacchaeus, your wicked little exploiter of taxes, if you change your profession and if you repent of the way you've been oppressing people, then I'll come and have dinner with you.' He simply says, 'Zacchaeus, come down; I'm having dinner with you.' And this totally unexpected singling out of Zacchaeus turns his world upside down and leads immediately and very strongly to conversion of life, metanoia, repentance. And Zacchaeus says, 'I will restore anything I took fraudulently and I'm going to behave ethically and properly from now on.' The conversion follows the welcome, it doesn't come before it, which is fascinating and happens again and again in the Gospels.

What makes the welcome effective in Jesus' case is surely his complete personal integrity, his holiness and his compassion and his love. When people are accepted by him they sense that they are accepted by the one who is holy. And it is that encounter with the holy which shapes the foundation of the way in which they behave.

We try to be a welcoming Church, and I'm sure all the churches represented in this room try to be welcoming, but what challenges us in our welcoming is that we're not as holy as we ought to be. So it becomes very easy for us to welcome people in a way that doesn't stimulate conversion of life in them.

Lent is time to draw closer to God. It's a time as we draw nearer to God's compassion and mercy, to be aware of that holiness we draw close to, and allow it to convert us afresh inside. And it's a time, as we do this collectively, to become a holier Church, a better Church, a Church in which goodness and justice are more clearly visible, and so a Church which is able, when it welcomes others, to lead them also into conversion of life.