Saturday 23rd March

learn about God's true prophetic Word in our midst? How might these words guide Michael in the prophetic dimension of his ministry? How might these words guide Wessex Synod and its churches to be truly prophetic communities?

Perhaps the first thing we note is that the exiles are forced to face reality as it really is. Their defeat was catastrophic and overwhelming, and nothing was going to reverse it quickly. To think anything else was to buy into a false hope. If the exiles were to be able to live well, and even flourish, in their new and unwelcome context, the first thing they had to do was accept it. Harking back to the good old days was no good – for they were not going to return for at least 70 years, and as one quickly realises, one never does go back to the good old days. Only forward. To be a true prophet is to be realistic.

So when your new Moderator tells you that of course every congregation can have its own minister, that of course every new minister he inducts will restore the Sunday School to many scores or hundreds of children, will visit everyone in need every day, and magic an army of Elders, Secretaries, Treasurers and people for the tea-rota out of nowhere....well...you might be just a little sceptical.

Part of the prophetic ministry of the Moderator is precisely to help congregations face reality as it is. And much of our reality is currently extremely challenging. Pretending otherwise and that there are easy solutions gets us nowhere. We are required to face reality squarely, name it, and engage with it. That is the task of the truly prophetic Moderator.

 – it goes wrong. Sometimes badly wrong, A truthful prophet is one that encourages and nurtures flourishing communities.

A truly prophetic Moderator is called to be a pastor. I know through my own personal experience, as I'm sure many of you do already, just what a pastor Michael is. A prophetic Moderator will encourage healthy community, built on respect, transparency, and trust — and insist on a sound measure of good order as well.

I can assure you that Michael is very hot on good order – I think you'll find plenty of that, somehow! But good order and good governance is often the bedrock of good relationships, and good relationships the bedrock of good communities. Good communities are the bedrock of flourishing of all of us.

"That they may bear sons and daughters". A true prophet is concerned with the place of children and young people at the very centre of God's people, and for the well-being and flourishing of the generations to come. Concerned, therefore, for the future of the planet that will be the home of those who come after us, a true prophet is concerned with the handing on of the faith to the next generation. All of that too, should be at the heart of the prophetic ministry of a Moderator.

"Multiply there, and do not decrease". A true prophet is concerned with growth. And yes – I do mean numerical growth. Whilst being realistic about the situation the church finds itself in, a true prophet insists that growth is vital. To be alive is to be renewing constantly, is to be growing. We believe we have a profoundly precious gift in our knowledge of God and God's ways with the world in Christ. We believe it transforms individual lives and the lives of communities. We want others to share what we know and experience of the difference that makes – to share the hope that is within us.

A prophetic Moderator will challenge you to grow, to be intentional, and active about your plans to grow – just as I know Michael, and the good folk of Farnham, have challenged themselves with that vocation in recent years.

"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile". A true prophet does not rage against the enemy place that has become home. However foreign it feels, whatever terrible things the Babylonians had done to the Israelites – the were to seek their welfare. A true prophet turns the eyes of the community outwards from their own immediate concerns, such that they recognise that their own wellbeing is totally bound up with the wellbeing of others – because we are all interconnected and interdependent.

A prophetic Moderator will challenge you to lift your eyes to the world aroud (-)Tj 0.56 n (ow)]TJ 0 Tc 0 T

And so, we gather as Michael is true prophet in your midst	s inducted into th	is office. He is cha	llenged by this te	xt to be a