



**A sermon for Choral Evensong at Wells Cathedral,  
preached on Sunday 11 January by the Very  
Reverend Toby Wright, Dean of Wells**

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## **Bishop Bekynton**

Today we give thanks for the life and witness of Thomas Bekynton, Bishop of Bath and Wells, a man who rose from humble beginnings to become a scholar, diplomat, and servant of God. His legacy is woven into the very fabric of this city: the water that flows through Wells, the Chain Gate that links Vicars' Close to the Cathedral, and the chimneys that mark the skyline with their distinctive emblems. These are not mere architectural features—they are signs of a vision rooted in faith, service, and care for community.

Bekynton understood something profound: places matter. Homes matter. The spaces where we live and work shape the way we encounter God and one another. When he found the houses of Vicars' Close in disrepair, he did not turn away. He acted. He restored and connected. He made provision for beauty and dignity in the ordinary rhythms of life. In doing so, he reflected the heart of God - a God who does not leave us in ruin but calls us into renewal.

Our readings today speak powerfully into this moment. In Joshua, the people of Israel stand at the edge of the Jordan, ready to cross into the land of promise. The waters part, and they step forward in faith. It is a story of transition, of trusting God when the future feels uncertain. And in Hebrews, we are reminded that the God who spoke through the prophets now speaks through the Son - the One who sustains all things and makes all things new.

Friends, we too stand at a threshold. This year marks the beginning of a great work of restoration on Vicars' Close - a street that has stood for nearly 700 years, the oldest medieval street in Europe still serving its original purpose. Since the days of Ralph of Shrewsbury and Bekynton, generations have sung, prayed, and lived in those houses. And now, we are called to ensure that this heritage not only survives but flourishes for centuries to come.

This month we have also launched a bold new creative programme of activity for communities across Somerset, inspired by the history and heritage of Vicars' Close. The programme will see us work with community choirs across the county, support young people to take their first steps in the heritage sector through paid placements, host artist residencies and visual arts workshops and consult with our communities on the approach we are taking.

This is not just about bricks and mortar. It is about mission. It is about creating spaces where music can rise to heaven, where visitors can encounter beauty and history, where communities can gather and be inspired. Through creative programmes, through partnerships across Somerset, through opening these spaces to the public, we are saying: this story matters. This place matters. And the God who has been faithful through the ages is still at work among us.

To help us tell this story, following the restoration work, we will be opening an exciting new visitor attraction, opening up several of the spaces on the Close to the public. This will allow them to engage with the history and heritage of Vicars' Close, with an opportunity to see behind the scenes and experience the Close at different points in its history, spanning through time from its earliest foundations to the present day, allowing them to literally follow in the footsteps of Vicars' Choral.

Two liquids dominate the Gospels—water and wine. Water for washing, for baptism, for new life. Wine for rejoicing, for sharing, for the heavenly banquet. Bekynton gave Wells water - life-giving, sustaining. Today, we are invited to offer wine - the joy of hospitality, the richness of culture, the celebration of God's goodness. As we restore Vicars' Close, let us also restore hope, creativity, and community.

City leaders, Council members, partners in this vision: your role is vital. Just as Bekynton worked with others to shape a future for Wells, so we must work together now. This is not only about preserving history - it is about building a legacy of faith, beauty, and belonging for generations yet to come.

So let us step forward, as Israel did at the Jordan, trusting that the God who calls us will also equip us. Let us listen to the voice of the Son, who sustains all things by his word. And let us commit ourselves afresh to the work of renewal - in stone and in spirit—so that Wells may continue to be a beacon of light and hope for centuries to come.

May Bekynton inspire us to lead with vision, serve with humility, and act with courage. And may the God who makes all things new bless this work and all who share in it. Amen.