

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**Patronal Festival**  
**St Bartholomew's, Walmer Estate**  
**24 August 2008**

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Collect and Readings as APB, p.306-7  
Genesis 28:10-17  
Acts 5:12-16  
John 1:43-51

‘Jacob said, “Surely the Lord is in this place!”’

May I speak in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, it is a great joy to be with you this morning, and to share in your celebration of the Feast of St Bartholomew.

One of the greatest pleasures of being a bishop lies in visiting parishes across one's Diocese, and getting to know God's people, in all the rich diversity of who you are, and the circumstances of your lives.

I hope it is also a chance for you to get to know me a little better!

When I look at my life, I feel that more than anything else, the Lord has called me to be a pastor: to walk with God's people on their journey of life, and on their journey of faith. So I am looking forward to being a pastor in this diocese – alongside Bishop Garth, who of course carries the prime day to day responsibility.

Already I am struck by the great diversity in the life of our churches in Cape Town.

It was very evident this morning that I was driving into an area with a significant Muslim population. This must bring very specific challenges for you.

And of course, I am also glad to meet the people of St Phillips today – and District Six has its own distinct history and contemporary challenges, as we well know.

The good news is that God deals with us each in our own distinctiveness, as we are – both as individuals, and communities. Whatever our particular characteristics, Jesus meets us where we are, and calls us as we are.

It is the responsibility of the church, of the Diocese, of its structures and leaders, clergy and bishops together, to help the people of God hear this calling, and live it out.

Indeed, I hope that my visit here today will be an encouragement and support to you, as you seek to follow Jesus faithfully and to share his good news in Walmer Estate, and also in District Six.

And may I say thank you for your faithful witness within this community. In particular, I should like to thank Mrs Linda Abrahams, your warden, who is, I understand, intending to stand down because of ill health. Thank you for all you have done here – and thank you to everyone who supports the life of this church, and these congregations.

Our Gospel reading gives an example of how Jesus meets us as we are. As I am sure you know well, Christian tradition has long assumed that Bartholomew and the Nathanael of John's Gospel are the same person.

It seems that Nathanael is something of a cynic. Perhaps he'd say he was a realist – looking with a cool clear eye at the world, with so many problems, so many injustices, so much talk and so little action.

His friends are very enthusiastic about Jesus. But Nathanael, Bartholomew, doesn't want to put his trust in a stranger, only to find out that he is just another bringer of empty promises.

I think we can agree, this is fair enough!

Certainly, a Saviour who could only offer empty promises would not be much of a Saviour!

But Jesus is ready for him – and in just a sentence or two, demonstrates that he is not a man of empty words – but someone who deals with us at the very heart of our being.

Jesus words touch Nathanael at his very core. And Nathanael is stunned to realise that Jesus really, really, knows him.

Yet Jesus does not stop there. He says – You will see more than this.

His message to Nathanael then and to us today, is this: encountering Jesus is not just a one-off moment. There is always more to come.

And then he says these strange words 'You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man'.

What does he mean?

Nathanael will have remembered the story of Jacob that was our Old Testament reading.

Jacob is going to Haran. On his journey he has a dream, of a ladder between heaven and earth, and angels ascending and descending on it.

So what is Jesus saying? That we will see visions of angels?

No, he is saying something far more profound for the way we live our lives.

Jesus says that we shall be able to see him as the ladder, as the bridge, between heaven and earth. We shall be able to recognise him as the person in whom heaven and earth meet.

And therefore he is the place where – the person in whom – we hear the same message that Jacob hears.

The message is this: 'Know that I am with you, and will keep you, wherever you go ... for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.'

In Jesus there is always more to come – because in Jesus we shall find fulfilment of all the promises of God: of his unending love, of salvation, of healing and wholeness, of forgiveness and reconciliation, of new beginnings, and a fruitful life. All this, and more, will overflow in abundance to us in Jesus.

We just need to keep our eyes on him – we need to keep the focus of our lives on him. And then we will see it, more and more and more.

This is the message for all of us – even for cynics like Nathanael!

Bring your cynicism to Jesus, and let it be overwhelmed by the presence of heaven, and by the promises of God!

This was the experience of over 600 Anglican Bishops at the Lambeth Conference just a few weeks ago.

There has certainly been a lot of cynicism about. People have been predicting that the Anglican Communion will fall apart, and that nothing can be done to stop splits and schisms.

And yes, it is true that we have some serious disagreements, and these have at times been handled with some pretty bad behaviour.

Therefore many of us arrived at the Lambeth Conference feeling nervous, or defensive, or even a bit aggressive, about these disagreements.

But the focus of our time together was Jesus, Jesus as Saviour, incarnate in our contexts.

We started with a wonderful 3-day retreat led by the Archbishop of Canterbury. He challenged us to consider where it is that we see Jesus, the place where heaven and earth meet, whether through encounters or conversations or circumstances. Our retreat helped us to start by 'finding Jesus', by 'finding Christ' – and so we 'found ourselves' in Jesus Christ; and then we were ready to find one another, as brothers and sisters also in Jesus Christ.

So when we moved from Retreat to Conference, and met each day in Bible Studies of 8, and Indaba Groups of 40, we were surprised with joy and delight at the extent to which we found Christ in one another, and found one another in Christ.

We were very different in our backgrounds and views, but we learnt to share our faith journeys, the joys and pains of ministry, and our hopes and fears for the Anglican Communion, with ever deepening trust and honesty, openness and vulnerability.

We even exchanged divided opinions and sharp disagreements – but we learnt we could be honest, and held in love and respect by one another. It was intensely moving to build relationships in Christ that were far more profound than the differences with which we find ourselves labelled.

So, although we concluded that we do have big differences, especially about questions of human sexuality, and that we don't easily know how to deal with them, we also learnt something far more important.

We learnt that we meet one another 'in Christ'. We all belong to Jesus – and therefore we belong to each other, and we must keep on debating and discussion, in mutual care, respect and trust.

Belonging to Jesus helped us overcome our cynicism, our disillusionment, our pessimism and our negativity.

So if anyone tells you that the Anglican Communion is going to fall apart, don't believe them!

We'll carry on debating, even in this Diocese and Province, but we will not be turning our backs on one another.

So let me sum up:

Whatever it is that we are facing in life, we should bring it to Jesus, the one in whom heaven and earth meet. In him, we will find the answers that come from the promises of God.

So, if you are feeling cynical about life, don't pretend you're not – bring your cynicism to Jesus.

If you are feeling disillusioned – with politics and politicians, and how democracy is unfolding, and what is happening in the economy – don't pretend you're not. Bring it to Jesus.

Perhaps you're demoralised with the Church – well, we are not perfect, we know that, and we do not always get it right – bring it to Jesus.

Don't hide your worries from Jesus – bring them to him!

Bring the whole of your life to the place where heaven touches earth – so that the promises of God can bear fruit in your situation.

The Lord says – I am with you, and will keep you, wherever you go, and I will not leave you until I have done for you what I promised for you.

Jesus says – You will see greater things.

Amen.