

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**Provincial Standing Committee**  
**Homily for Eucharist – 18 September 2008**

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Readings: 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11;  
Luke 7: 36-50  
Psalm 118: 14-29

May I speak in the name of the One God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit – Creator, Redeemer and Giver of Life.

Once again as I prepared to preach, I marvelled at the way the Holy Spirit works through the lectionary!

We could hardly have asked for more appropriate readings than those we have just heard, as we meet to reflect on the life of the Church, and God's calling upon our lives.

The passage from St Paul's letter to the Romans draws us back to the heart of our faith – what is the essence of the gospel, which we are called to hear, to receive, to live, and to pass on, as the Anglican Church in Southern Africa?

Let me read those key verses again:

'For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received – that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day ... so we proclaim and so we have come to believe.' (1 Cor 15:3-4, 11)

The heart of our faith is to be found in Jesus, God incarnate, God's gift of love: given that all who believe in him might not perish but have eternal life; and sent into the world, not to condemn the world, but that through him the world might be reconnected to God – to paraphrase those famous verses from John's Gospel (Jn 3:16-17).

Six months ago, in fear and trembling, I worked on the Charge for my installation service.

I was praying that God would lead me not only to what the church needed to hear, but to what I also needed to hear, as I began my ministry. You know the saying; "preacher" is always the last one to hear his/her sermon.

By his grace, I am finding that, he provided words and phrases that are speaking clearly into my life and ministry within our Church.

One of those phrases has become something like a touchstone for me. It came from almost the opening paragraph. Here I said:

‘Thank you that you are partners with me in the gospel, as we seek afresh to discover what it is to be the body of Christ in our time, and who God is in Jesus Christ, for us here and now.’

This is the task of PSC – to consider what it is to be the body of Christ in our time, and who God is in Jesus Christ, for us, here in Southern Africa, now in 2008 (Canon 43).

The centrality of Jesus was also fundamental to the meeting of the Lambeth Conference, as I hope will be clear in our discussions of the Conference.

Jesus was central from the retreat with which we began (and in which the Archbishop of Canterbury asked us to consider what it means for every believer to be called to be a place where God’s Son is revealed to others) through to our Bible Studies and Indaba Groups – where, having ‘found ourselves’ in Jesus Christ through our retreat, we were then able to find one another, as brothers and sisters also in Jesus Christ, despite sometimes some considerable differences.

The twin themes of the conference which guided our debates were our identity as Anglicans – an identity found only in Jesus; and mission – which of course is the sharing in God’s mission through Christ to his world.

So the key question was always – how can we grow in our relationship with Jesus, and in faithfulness to him in our lives, and in the lives of the Churches we lead?

Faithfulness to Jesus, and to his gospel were central also to the meeting of GAFCON, which Bishop Bethlehem told the Synod of Bishops about. Bishop Bethlehem reported that the Jerusalem Declaration, issued at that meeting, begins and ends its tenets of faith with Jesus. At SOB, we did not feel the need to respond to GAFCON nor commend it in our province, but did affirm our unity in Christ to uphold instruments of Communion as they are and as they unfold, e.g. Covenant, pastoral Commissions and Windsor.

So at PSC we too must start with Jesus – we must learn the lessons of Lambeth, that resting in Jesus, as individuals and together, is the heart of what we are called to do as leaders. Debating agendas and passing motions is not our primary task – our primary task is to seek God’s face, and declare his glory to the world.

It is by focussing on Jesus – especially when we face issues that are difficult and painful – that we will be enabled to be as the woman, whose devoted tears and trusting faith brought her to the place of God’s saving act, the place of shalom peace and wholeness.

It is by putting Jesus first – as in the words of invitation for him to share this meal with us, and beyond, and in how we really relate to him – that we will be transformed.

This is why we are structuring our meeting with more time to grow in relationship with Jesus, and, in him, in relationship with each other.

And I hope that you will also find ways to share the riches of this essential approach in your own Diocesan structures.

It is only by resting in God, that we shall be able to find out how it is that God who promises 'I will build my church' wants us to be partners with him.

Of course, the Growing the Church initiative is part of our response, and I commend it to you wholeheartedly.

But in this, and in every aspect of the lives of our Dioceses and Parishes, I feel that we have a particular, sharply focussed, calling and challenge at this time, 14 years after a new era dawned across Southern Africa.

Let me put it this way:

Light dawned with the men of vision. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was, in many ways like Nelson Mandela, given the gift of expressing profound truths with great simplicity, and giving us a vision of hope of a new life before us all – a new life that would be transformed through God's promises of new beginnings; the transfiguring touch of salvation found in the truth that sets us free; of reconciliation, of healing and wholeness, of wiping away every tear; and bringing us new life in abundance.

Yet it takes hard work to turn vision into concrete action, and it also needs appropriate structures. We know that Archbishop Njongo was often nicknamed 'Canon Bureaucrat' because of his abiding desire to ensure that the Church is shaped in the most appropriate way to live out the life of our calling. He was exactly the successor we needed to build the bridge from vision to reality.

South Africa at the political level, also found its visionary replaced by a technocrat. But now South Africa is faced with the sad reality in that its quality of service delivery is wanting. For various reasons, the vision is not being delivered through the new structures, in ways that make a tangible, sustainable, lasting difference to the life of people on the ground.

This is a lesson for the Church now, and not only in South Africa, but across our whole Province. We too must ask, are we doing 'service delivery'?

By this, I do not mean, are we running effective social development programmes on poverty, and AIDS and all the other needs which we so often find ourselves called to address. These are important, vital, but I want to focus on a different aspect of our calling today.

I mean, are we doing 'service delivery' with the Gospel in our varied contexts? Is the vision that God has given us, are his promises of good news, finding expression in the lives of our people: in our parishes, townships, cities and villages?

This is a question that burns in my heart. I know that God has called me to be a pastor, and to help people find their own relationship with God, and to grow in that relationship with God.

God's promises in Jesus Christ of healing and wholeness, of forgiveness and reconciliation and new hope: are people really experiencing these, in their lives?

Are those who were battered and broken by the past, who still bear its scars in their soul, finding their lives touched with Jesus' healing hand?

Are those longing for peace encountering the one who is the Prince of Peace?

Are those who are still heavily burdened by past experience and memories, hearing the voice of the one who says 'come unto me and rest'?

Are those whose hearts are broken, experiencing the reality of his overwhelming love?

What is gospel good news to those who are searching for integrity and self-respect; in poverty; in war; dehumanised by our past contextual challenges? Inequality, class, race and gender.

Jesus, God in human form, wants to restore to each of us our true humanity, meeting each of us in our own individual and communally needs. And he wants to make us channels of his healing touch to all we pastor and reach out to.

This is true not only of the pains of the past, but of our present trials – not least of ongoing poverty, of HIV and AIDS and malaria and TB, and the challenges of promoting good governance excessive wealth with extreme poverty and stable democracy and servant leadership everywhere, and at every level.

Making visions a living reality is hard work – but it is God's work, and he will equip us and direct us, whoever we are, in whatever context we find ourselves, and those we minister to.

There are no easy 'one size fits all' answers – but we serve a God who numbers the hair on each of our heads. He has made to measure promises for every single one of his children in their communities. And, as St Paul says, his grace is with each one of us, and makes us who we are.

So let us have confidence, as we rest in Jesus, and ask him what it means to be his body, here and now, across all the diversities of our Province, and the people it contains.

Let me draw to a close by commending to you the resource book Season of Creation. This has liturgical and other material for helping us grow in appreciation of the wonders of the world we inhabit, and the mysteries of abundant life we share with all God's creation – and how we are called to be faithful to God in the way we use these natural resources with which he has gifted us.

Though the booklet was produced in the hope that it could be used through September, I know that there have been difficulties with its distribution. I know also that there is also translation work in hand. So, if you are not already using it, can I encourage you to consider celebrating this Season at some other time of year.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, in Jesus, as the Psalmist says, 'This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.' Let us be those whose lives declare that the Lord is my strength and my song, and, whatever our need, he has indeed become my salvation.

Amen.