

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Diocesan Family Day at Bishop's
“Celebrating our Heritage, Growing our Church”
24 September 2008

Readings (lections of the day): Prov 30:5-9, Lk 9:1-6

Introduction

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Diocese of Cape Town, I greet you in the precious name of our Lord, who calls us to proclaim his kingdom, and his healing touch!

I am delighted to have this opportunity to meet the Diocesan family.

One of the down-sides of being an Archbishop as well as a Diocesan bishop, is that the Province is always competing for my attention.

This was evident even in the last week, with meetings of the Synod of Bishops and Provincial Standing Committee, launching the Growing the Church initiative, the consecration of the new Bishop of Grahamstown, and the inauguration of a new Rector at the College of the Transfiguration!

So I hope today will be a chance to redress the balance.

Please do come and introduce yourselves to me during the rest of today – though forgive me if I do not remember *everyone's* names! [It is so good to see so many people here, despite the unpredictability of the weather.]

Our Heritage

Heritage Day is a good occasion for our gathering, with its invitation to reflect on our past, our present, our future – as South Africans, and as Anglicans.

When we look to our past, no matter what difficulties we faced; no matter what different paths our journeys took to bring us here together today; our experience testifies that, as the writer of the book of Proverbs said, 'Every word of God proves true – he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.'

Isn't that so? Amen!

Our Call

Jesus has called us together, uniting us in our great diversity, just as he called the Twelve in our Gospel reading. We are also sent, like the Twelve, to proclaim his kingdom, and bring his healing.

Calling and sending were also at the heart of my installation Charge, from which one particular sentence has become something of a touchstone for me. It is that we must [quote] 'seek afresh to discover what is it to be the body of Christ in our time, and who God is in Jesus Christ, for us here and now' [unquote].

This is our task, for our present, to take us into the future.

Being the Body of Christ

Being the body of Christ, here and now, in the Diocese and Parishes of Cape Town, means we must constantly nurture our relationship with Jesus.

He provides whatever resources we need for living God's kingdom life – like the disciples, we need no staff to lean on, no bag of tricks, no bread, no purse. And, as I said to the Chapter – please, we don't need too many Diocesan meetings of one sort or another, either!

Of course, Jesus knows that we do need food and money. But the point is this – we do not put our trust in finances nor in techniques. We put our trust in Jesus, who will lead us on the path ahead.

The Challenge of Service Delivery

14 years into democracy, I feel that this path ahead offers one very specific challenge, which we are being called to answer in many different ways.

Let me put it this way:

Democracy dawned with the men of vision. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, like Nelson Mandela, had a gift for expressing profound truths with great simplicity. He gave us a vision of hope for abundant new life for everyone, transformed through God's promises.

Turning vision into concrete action is hard work, and requires appropriate structures. Archbishop Njongo, our so-called 'Canon Bureaucrat', was exactly the successor we needed to build these practical bridges from vision to reality, not least in the long overdue restructuring of this diocese.

South Africa at the political level also found its visionary replaced by a technocrat. But, sadly, government is failing on service delivery. The vision is not being delivered in ways that make a tangible, sustainable, lasting difference to those in greatest need of change.

The same question faces the Church. As I said to Provincial Standing Committee last week, we must ask ourselves 'Are we doing "service delivery"?'

By this, I do not mean, are we running effective social development programmes on poverty, HIV and AIDS, the environment, and the other needs around us. Vital though these are, they are not our number one calling.

My question is this: are we doing 'service delivery' with the Gospel?

The Gospel Made Real for Every Single Person

This question 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.

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

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 of love?

Are those who lost their peace encountering the Prince of Peace?

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

What is gospel good news to those who are searching for integrity and self-respect – dehumanised as we all were, by our past contextual challenges, and their continuing legacies?

Jesus, God in human form, wants to restore to each of us our true humanity, meeting our own individual needs. And he wants to make us channels of his kingdom and of his healing touch to those around us, in the same specific way. This is true service delivery.

It is true both of the pains of the past, and our present trials – including ongoing poverty, TB, HIV and AIDS, and the challenges of promoting good governance and stable democracy and servant leadership at every level.

The God of Diverse Creativity

Many of us grew up with one big simple question, for the church and for the country, to which there was one big simple answer – the end of apartheid.

Now, in both politics and faith, we have to deal with complicated and diverse issues, with no big simple answers.

Democratic life is messy. This is a reality. But, for us who are new to it, it can be confusing, and unsettling, as the tides of politics ebb and flow, and personalities change, especially in a turbulent week such as this.

But we should not be discouraged – instead, as the church, we say, Let us learn to do democracy even better. Set-backs may happen – but let us not give up pressing on ahead.

Let us uphold our constitution and its institutions: government, parliament, and judiciary. Let us hold politicians accountable to the electorate. Let us promote 'service delivery' in moral principals, ethical standards, and the values of ubuntu: for us all, but especially for politicians and civil servants, in living out the daily detail of our democratic vision.

As Christians, we must also learn to live out God's kingdom vision in the daily detail of our lives. The Church has not 'lost its vision' – but in changed circumstances, we must learn to express God's vision differently, appropriately to the complexities of our lives.

We now face the challenge of discerning the finger prints of God in the 'little things': of every time and place, of every person and circumstance.

Do not forget – we serve a God who numbers the hairs on every person's heads. He has made-to-measure promises for every single one of his children; and for each one of our parishes, our communities.

If we pause to reflect, each of us knows this is true, from our own personal experience, of how God has met us in our own particular individual needs.

So we must not be daunted by this differentiated calling – the same gospel, diversely expressed, across our diversity.

The Strength of Authentic, Adaptable, Anglican Faith

One of the strengths of Anglican tradition has been its adaptability in applying the gospel authentically to new contexts and cultures as it has encountered them. If we could not do this, I doubt we would be the world-wide Communion of over 80 million people that we are today.

We must be similarly flexible and imaginative in addressing the particular concerns of our own various communities and contexts – coming alongside people as they are, as Jesus did in his encounters with so many different individuals 2000 years ago.

The Growing the Church initiative of our Province is one source of resources. Its aim is to communicate the best of Anglicanism in adaptable and creative ways, that can help people of the 21st century find their connection to the living God, who reaches out to them in love.

The Soma network is another place for finding inspiration. Soma is the Greek work for 'body' – the body of Christ. The Soma network sends partnership teams around the world, to share faith and exchange experiences, learning from each other, and encouraging one another. This week we are delighted to host a Soma team from Ireland, for whom we shall pray later in this service. There are also Soma teams from this diocese, who are spending this week in Angola, Namibia, Mozambique and Port Elizabeth and we shall pray for them too.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters of the Diocese of Cape Town, our call is service delivery – making God's vision a reality, so Jesus' promises find tangible and sustained expression in the lives of our people; our parishes, suburbs, townships, and city.

For it is in the lives of transformed individuals that the Gospel is made real; that the kingdom of God comes to life and bears fruit.

Be encouraged, for God will equip us and direct us, whoever we are, in whatever context we find ourselves. His desire is service delivery of the fullness of the gospel, the abundant life of the kingdom, the renewal of his healing, for every single person in Cape Town.

May it be so. Amen.