

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**Provincial Standing Committee: Third Homily**  
**12 September 2009**

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Luke 6:43-49

<sup>43</sup>Jesus said, ‘No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; <sup>44</sup>for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. <sup>45</sup>The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. <sup>46</sup>‘Why do you call me “Lord, Lord”, and do not do what I tell you? <sup>47</sup>I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them. <sup>48</sup>That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. <sup>49</sup>But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.’ (NRSV)

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, over the past days, I have talked a lot about our unity in Christ – about recognising him in one another, and especially in those who are different from us, in whatever way.

I have talked about encountering others who are different from us, and yet who say they also earnestly desire to follow Jesus, in the circumstances of their lives.

Today St Luke warns us that merely saying ‘I follow Jesus’ is not enough.

The earnestness of our desire is shown in the fruit which our lives bear.

This is why I spoke about the importance of getting to know people well enough to be able to see how Christ dwells within them, and shapes their words, their actions, their attitudes, their lives.

Today we are prompted to reflect not on what this means in our own lives.

Verse 49 reminds us of building. And every builder knows that you have to make sure you get your foundations right!

St Paul might only have been a tent-maker, and tents are not famous for having foundations, but he wrote this in the first letter to the Corinthians:

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

Ultimately the only foundation is Jesus Christ.

I love this passage. It was set as for the Eucharist on 1 September – the day on which we celebrate the life and ministry of Bishop Robert Gray.

I think of his life of dedicated service to Southern Africa as a careful master builder. And now it is for us to step up, and take our turn at this building work, the building of the kingdom of God.

We must build with care on the work that has gone before – yet with confidence that the foundation beneath is utterly firm – the rock who is Jesus Christ.

We must be like master builders: choosing on the best materials, the best tools, and making the best possible job, with attention to detail at every step..

Paying close attention is also necessary when growing fruit trees, as any gardener or farmer will tell you.

There is always something to be done: ensuring a reliable water supply, fertilising the soil, pruning and trimming and training the branches, watching out for parasites. A bit of weeding here, a bit of compost there.

And what might all this mean in more clearly Christian terms?

Jesus, the starting point; and then the faithful life of worship, which leads to the witness and service for which we are commissioned at Confirmation.

It is a life of daily prayer – of listening to God as well as speaking to him. It is taking seriously the Daily Offices, and regular Eucharists.

It is reading our Bibles, not only in our services and in hearing sermons, but taking time for really meditating deeply, regularly, on the Word of God.

Then there is the extra fertilizer of retreats, tithing, Bible-study notes, reading books, being part of a home group, having a spiritual director – I am sure you can think of many more possibilities.

It is developing and keeping up the habits that help us to ‘see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day, by day, by day’.

This is the call to every Christian.

But it is a particular call to those in Christian leadership, and especially the ordained ministry.

Let us bear this in mind as we consider our discussion on theological education last night. This is about so much more than putting information into heads.

It is about training people to grow in Christ in every aspect of their lives – and to keep on growing; and to model all this to others, so they also can grow and keep growing.

‘Formation’ as we sometimes call it is perhaps the most important area of all – if you develop this way of life, you can learn the rest.

But if you don’t have this, the risk is that everything else is a clanging cymbal or noisy gong.

In life, there is no doubt – floods come. But if we have deep roots and strong foundations, and conform our lives to Jesus every step of the way – we shall not be moved.

To him be the glory, now and for ever. Amen