

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**Holy Spirit, Heideveld – 40th Anniversary**  
**20 September 2009**

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1 Kings 8:22-30  
Psalm 84  
1 Peter 2:4-9  
Matthew 21:12-16  
(Readings all taken from the Good News Bible)

May I speak in the name of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the God who inspires all his children to perfect praise.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, dear people of God of Holy Spirit, Heideveld, may I say again what a joy it is to be with you this morning.

Congratulations on your 40th anniversary!

Thank you for your invitation to join you in your celebrations.

And may I say a particular thank you to all the young people who are helping lead the service today – as well as to everyone else who has had a part in making today special.

Of course, most of all, today we give thanks to God, for his faithfulness to us, and to all who have worshipped here over the last forty years.

Our first reading reminded us that God is a God who is faithful – who keeps his promises.

And today we come to offer our gratitude that he has indeed kept his promises, and dwelt with his people in Heideveld, and sustained and upheld the Church of the Holy Spirit through good times and bad, over the last four decades.

We also thank God for his gift of faithfulness in those who have led this church and its people – for clergy and wardens and councillors and lay ministers, and all who have served the life of this congregation.

Many of you are here today. It is wonderful to be able to share this occasion with you – thank you, on behalf of everyone associated with Holy Spirit, for all you have done over the years.

In our first reading, we heard how King Solomon wondered at the mystery of how a God of infinite power and might, greater than all of heaven, could somehow be present within the walls of a building – even a building as vast and magnificent as the Temple in Jerusalem.

And yet, though his mind, wise though it was, found this hard to comprehend, at the same time he knew, he knew with every fibre of his being, that it was indeed the case that the presence of God was there, living among his people.

He knew that when they came to the temple, God met them, and heard their prayers.

And this was true not only for important people, like him, the king.

It was true of every single person, no matter how great or small, rich or poor, old or young.

Today we are celebrating all this and more.

First, we too know that we meet God in a very particular way when we come to this place.

It has been a place of faithful prayer and worship, of preaching and praise, where many have felt God touch their lives in special ways.

It is a place where we continue to come, Sunday by Sunday, and often during the week as well, knowing the truth of Jesus' promise that 'wherever two or three come together in my name, I am there with them' (Matt 18:20).

But more than this, Jesus is Emmanuel – which means 'God with us'.

He is with us, not only when we meet in this place – or even when two or more gather together in his name in a house group or bible study or old people's home.

Jesus is Emmanuel, 'God with us', for every person who answers his call to each of us, saying 'follow me – you, and you, and you, and you – follow me'.

This is an even greater mystery than the one that stretched Solomon's great wisdom!

For the eternal word of God, the second person of the Trinity, laid aside the glories of heaven, and took on human form – living as a human being, experiencing all that we experience – even death.

Just let us think about this for a moment – especially those of you who are less than 33 years old, or thereabouts.

Once, Jesus was exactly the same age as you are!

Once, he was probably going through much the same things that you are going through.

The Bible tells us very little about his childhood, his teens, even his twenties.

We know that he went to Jerusalem when he was about 12 years old, and that he was especially drawn to the Temple.

He knew that this was the place for being close to God, the God whom he called Father – he knew that his heavenly Father was calling him into a very special relationship, a very special life.

But it was only when he was about 30 that we hear how that call finally took shape – that he began his life of preaching and teaching, and calling people to repent and believe in the kingdom of God.

Throughout his teens and twenties, it seems he was wrestling to make sense of life, to make sense of the call he had felt from God.

And I guess, as he did this, he experienced life much as any other teenager does – all the ups and downs of adolescence:

- the way our bodies become strange to us, as we change from children and gradually mature into adulthood
- the way our hormones kick into action, and our emotions start to swing in all directions
- the way that our minds grow to think and feel in new ways
- the way that sometimes what we are capable of physically, is far ahead of our mental and emotional maturity.

Ah, sometimes I am so glad I am not a teenager, a young adult, again!

It is a wonderful time of discovery, but it is also a dangerous time – as we risk getting caught up in saying things and doing things, in the enthusiasm of the moment, that too often we regret later!

And that could be all sorts of things

- it could be getting caught up in drugs, or crime, or going too far with our girlfriends or boyfriends
- in all sorts of ways, it could be letting ourselves be persuaded to do things that really, we'd rather not
- in all sorts of ways, it could be allowing ourselves to get sucked into saying the things, doing the things, that those around us are doing, whether or not we really agree with them
- in all sorts of ways, it could be saying yes, when really in our hearts we'd prefer to say no
- in all sorts of ways, we can find ourselves in hot water – and it is harder and harder to get out and make a fresh start.

And the message of Jesus to us is to say 'Hang on in there – be cool; don't let yourselves be suckered – be the person you want to be, be the best you can be.'

He says 'Hold on to me – I've been there! I know what it is like to be teenager, a young adult, under pressure. I'm on your side, and I want to help you.'

He says, 'Remember, I AM Emmanuel – I AM God with you – I DO hear your prayer, and I am with you to help you, to give you the strength to say the right thing, to do the right thing.'

Because Jesus was not just Emmanuel, God with us, for those people he met in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Galilee, 2000 years ago.

After he died on the cross, he was raised from the dead, never to die again.

He ascended into heaven – where he is alive for ever, and where he sits at the right hand of God the Father, praying for every single one of us, all the time.

And, as he ascended to heaven, he made this promise to his followers 'I am with you always, to the end of time' (Matt 28:20).

As he has promised his disciples, at the Last Supper, by the power of the Holy Spirit he would come and make his home with us.

This is what happened at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the first disciples.

This is what happens for every one of us, in our baptism – we are united with Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that he is for each of us 'Emmanuel', God with us, always and everywhere, 24/7.

So, wherever we are, whatever we face, he's there to help us.

He is not only to be found within the walls of churches – though when we come here, we are often especially aware of his presence.

His promise is to live with us, in us, so that, by his grace, we grow in knowledge and love of him, and come increasingly to be filled with all the fulness of God.

For Jesus is far more than merely a man who lived 2000 years ago and became a good example for us.

Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the incarnate second person of the Trinity – the 'Word made flesh' as St John's gospel puts it.

Jesus shares in our humanity so that, united with his death and resurrection in baptism, we, by the power of the Spirit, may be 'in Christ', and so partake of his divinity – the promise of eternal life at one with him, which we shall know in all its fulness, beyond death.

No one else can do this for us.

Jesus, the crucified, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven – and it is because he lives eternally, that all of us can enjoy the wonders of a living relationship with him.

He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world – for us, and for all who throw themselves on the mercy of God, not trusting in their own righteousness.

Only in Jesus do we find the ability to transcend the limitations and failings of humanity.

He gives us the strength, if we ask him, to say the right things, make the right choices, do what is right.

But more than that, he is the one who can help us have a fresh start, when we have got it wrong.

He can help us face our mistakes, and deal with their consequences, and he helps us get back on the right track.

For he alone is the sure and certain hope of forgiveness for all we have done wrong, for all we have failed to do, for falling short, for letting others down, for letting ourselves down.

Jesus is the one to whom we look, not only for forgiveness, but also to bring fresh beginnings, and to do the rescue work of salvation and redemption.

He is the one who promises to transfigure and transform the mediocre and the fallible, into something where the glory of God is revealed, and God's eternal purposes bear fruit that will last into all eternity.

Only in Jesus Christ do we find the redemptive healing of our souls from the pains of a broken and hurting world.

Only in Jesus Christ do we find the wisdom to know how to live transformatively, and the courage and strength to do so.

Only in Christ do we find the ability to love beyond our own capacity to love – and to call down unreserved blessings on those whose lives seem to be most directed against us and all we stand for.

This is why St Peter calls him the valuable stone, the cornerstone, the foundation stone, the most important stone of all.

In any building, what matters most is getting the foundations right, especially at the corners – because if these go wrong, then whatever you build on them, is likely to come crashing down!

So St Peter says, build your life on Jesus!

And more than this – God wants to use you as a stone in what he is building!

God is building his kingdom through his people.

He wants every one of us to be part of what he is building.

Every single one of us has a special place in what he is creating.

Remember, says St Peter – Jesus was thought of as worthless, good for nothing – but he became the most important stone of all.

It is the same with all of you, all of us, says St Peter.

There is nobody here who is worthless or good for nothing, in the eyes of God.

Everyone here is special – and all we have to do is let God use us, in the building of his spiritual Temple.

All we have to do is say yes to him, to say yes to Jesus – and let him lead us and guide us, and use us as he wants to do.

It does not matter how old or young you are. Jesus knew God's call when he was only 12.

It does not matter whether you haven't got your act together yet – Jesus didn't start his ministry until he was 30.

And it does not matter if your life has gone off the rails a bit – because Jesus can put you straight.

All you need to do is 'come to Jesus – come to him, the living stone, the cornerstone', as St Peter says 'for whoever believes in him will never be disappointed.'

This is what we are doing today.

We have come to him to say thank you – thank you for 40 years of his faithfulness to us; 40 years of knowing him as God with us, through good times and bad, through thick and thin.

And we have come to him, to dedicate our lives to him once again, knowing that into the future his promise to be God with us is one that we can trust.

We come to the altar rail – as some of you will come for the first time, to receive Communion today.

We put out our hands, open before him. [Like this ...]

They are open – first, because we offer ourselves to him – we offer ourselves to be used in building God's spiritual temple.

And they are open because, second, we are ready to receive everything that God promises for us.

Most of all, he promises himself, to be with us – and so we give him thanks, confident that, as St Peter says, whoever believes in him will never be disappointed.'

Amen.