

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**Baptisms and Confirmation, with Evensong**  
**Christ Church Kenilworth**  
**7 November 2010**

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*Reading: Matthew 20:1-16 (TNIV)*

May I speak in the name of God, who calls us all to labour in his vineyards.

Dear people of God of Christ Church Kenilworth, and especially you, dear candidates for baptism and for confirmation, it is a great joy to be with you this evening.

A particular welcome to those who have joined us from Diocesan College, and to all the families and friends who are here especially for this special service.

The parable of Jesus which we have just heard is probably familiar to most, if not all, of us.

And most, if not all, of us will know the standard interpretations:

God's love and God's salvation are for everyone, in full – indeed, limitless – measure. And it makes no difference how good we have or haven't been; and it makes no difference how old or young we are when we give our lives into his hands.

Whether we have served God faithfully for years, or whether we have had a terrible roller-coaster of life, and turn to Jesus on our deathbeds – all the wealth of heaven is promised to us, without differentiation.

Most of us, I guess, have lost the sense of outrage and unfairness that Jesus' first listeners would have experienced, on hearing this tale of an employer who pays his casual labourers exactly the same, whether they have done a full day's work, or just an hour.

And perhaps we have heard too, alternative explanations of how those who were strong were always picked first; and those who were old, or sick, or disabled, or pregnant women, would have been picked last.

(If any of you have ever employed people from the side of the road, I am sure that you have always looked first for those who appear able to work hard all day long! I certainly have done so!)

Indeed, the old and sick and disabled and pregnant would have been lucky to have been picked at all, since they would be unlikely to work hard, for any length of time.

But (so this explanation goes), God sees that their need for food – for all that a full day's pay could provide – was just as great as those who were fit and strong.

And so God ensures that they have the dignity of being called, and the dignity of being paid, according to their needs and not according to their abilities.

He provides a different sort of justice.

If we know the story at all well, we will have got used to these interpretations – that, in a nutshell, no matter how unfair it may seem from our perspective, God knows better.

And we know too that we should not go questioning God!

Well – that's the theory, at least!

But let me try and root this parable not in theological theory, but in the realities of our lives, as we experience them here and now – and especially as they relate to the promises we each make at our confirmation, to respond to God's call to live lives of faithful worship, witness and service, empowered by his Holy Spirit.

The promises you will make today – the promises so many of the rest of us have already made – speak of renouncing all that is evil, all that draws us away from the love of God, all that diminishes our humanity, and prevents us becoming the people God intends us to be.

And these promises also tell of how we 'believe and trust in him'.

Here is the crunch.

Yes, we believe the truths of our faith – the truths that are summed up in the form of the creed to which we respond.

We believe that God the Father created the whole universe and all that is in it, ourselves included.

We believe that his Son, Jesus Christ, is our Saviour and Lord, who redeemed humankind.

We believe that his Holy Spirit gives life to all of God's people.

And we not only believe with our heads, but we also trust this God with our whole lives.

But *for what* are we trusting him?

Certainly, we trust that he will work his salvation in us and through us – and that, when we die, we will know God's forgiveness, won for us by Christ on the cross, and so be welcomed into our eternal heavenly home.

Yet what about the time between now and then? What of the years, even decades, that lie ahead?

God willing, it will be a very long time indeed before those of you who are being confirmed today find yourselves crossing from life to death!

What are you expecting from God, in the life that lies ahead of you?

Well, what does God actually promise?

The words of this service are rather vague, I have to tell you!

Yes, there is the promise of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – the knowledge of God's presence with us, through thick and thin. 'I will be with you always, to the end of time' said Jesus, prior to his Ascension.

And when I lay hands on you, I pray for God to confirm and strengthen you with his Spirit, and empower you for service.

But there is no word about what this life of service – or, as it says elsewhere, the life of worship, witness and service will specifically entail!

And this is where we can be helped by turning back to the gospel reading, and seeing what lessons it has for us, in the apparent unfairnesses and randomness of life.

The bottom line is this – and I do not want to put you off, here! – God doesn't say much about what sort of life he has in store for you.

He doesn't say whether it will be long or short, trouble-free or tough – whether you will have joy all the way, or whether life will be full of endless struggles and disappointments.

You have no idea whether you will be like one of those picked early, who labour long and hard; or whether you will have an easy, stress-free, journey to all the promises of heaven.

Perhaps you will have fame and fortune. Perhaps you won't.

Perhaps the dreams you have for life now will bear fruit. Perhaps they won't.

Perhaps – and this is where it starts to become really hard – perhaps it will seem that other people get it easier than you.

Perhaps others get called by God into positions where they are successful and admired. Perhaps it will seem as though God favours some people over others. Perhaps there are people of whom you will be very jealous indeed.

Ah, now we can guess what some of those labourers in Jesus' parable really felt like!

What is Jesus' word to us, as we look into our unknown futures?

He says to each of us 'follow me'. And it is, for each of us, a very specific and personal invitation.

Listen to these words of the Lord recorded by the prophet Isaiah: 'Do not be afraid, I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine' (Is 43:1b).

Each one of us is unique and precious in the sight of God, created by him to know his love.

And for each of us he has plans and purposes. As St Paul wrote to the Ephesians

'For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life' (Eph 2:10).

Now, in general terms, the call to each of us is the same – a life of worship, witness and service.

But for each of us, how that cashes out in practice will differ, and be unique to each of us.

So I cannot guess which of you might end up in business, or politics, or academia, or teaching, or law, or finance, or government service or anything else.

Perhaps some of you, to be confirmed today, or sitting in the congregation, are called to ordained ministry – I pray it may be so.

But do not ever think that to be ordained is in any way superior to any other calling.

Indeed, it is often joked that God calls to ordination those he does not trust to remain faithful lay people!

There is no higher ambition than this – to be faithful and obedient; to be where God wants you to be, doing what God wants you to be doing – and to be doing it his way, though his power, and it might be in business or parliament, or even in the way you are a spouse, a parent, a neighbour.

There is nothing that can be more important, more significant, in the entire universe, than forwarding the purposes of God, building his kingdom.

This is true for individuals and for the Church as a whole.

And so let me say a little about how we are trying to live out this life of faithful obedience within the Anglican Church of Southern Africa.

When I was installed as Archbishop in March 2008, I spoke of the need for us to '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'.

Over the last two years we have been following a deliberate process of prayer and of taking counsel together, to discern this call of God.

Finally, five weeks ago, at our Provincial Synod, we affirmed the Vision we believe the Lord is putting before us.

This is threefold:

First, we are to be Anchored in Christ – as revealed to us in Holy Scripture.

Jesus Christ alone is Saviour and Lord, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

It is not naïve to say that, to a very great degree, Jesus truly is the answer to all our central questions of life, from Kenilworth to Khayelitsha, from rural Mozambique or inner city Johannesburg.

Second, we are Committed to God's mission. Whatever God calls us to do and be, our answer should be 'Here am I, send me; here we are, send us.'

Third, we are to be Transformed by the Spirit.

Through our openness, our willingness, to be transformed, God will equip and empower us to embody and proclaim the message of his redemptive hope and healing for all people and for creation.

Anchored in Christ; Committed to God's Mission; Transformed by the Spirit.

This is our Vision, which we can sum up as 'A, C, T' – in other words, 'Anglicans ACT'.

And indeed, one of the distinctives, and strengths of being an Anglican lies in our readiness to ACT anywhere and everywhere.

In doing so, we follow the example of Jesus.

In his incarnation – that is, in taking human form, and eating with sinners, he teaches us not to be afraid to roll up our sleeves, and get our hands dirty (so to speak) as we endeavour to shine the light of the gospel into every situation, into every aspect of human activity.

This is true witness and service.

And the way for us to live this life faithfully and obediently, as individuals, as congregations and parishes, as Dioceses, and within the wider church, is always the same.

We start with worship, and we start with being Anchored in Christ.

This is how each of you today will discover the life that God has in store for you.

Being anchored in Christ means keeping in close touch with who Jesus was, how Jesus lived – and listening out always to his voice calling you to follow:

to take this or that path in life, to make this or that decision, to choose this option rather than that, as life unfolds.

We do this most of all with reading our Bibles and praying.

Most of all, we have to learn to pray not only speaking to God, but listening to him as well.

I like to joke that God has made us with one mouth and two ears, so we should draw the conclusion that he wants us to do twice as much listening as speaking!

Listening to God takes practice – it is hard work sitting still and opening your heart and soul and mind to Jesus. Some people like to focus on a candle, or a picture; some like to hold a Bible verse in their mind, or even a phrase like ‘your will be done’ or ‘Lord, have mercy’ or ‘I believe and trust in you’, and quietly repeat it under their breath, as they practice resting in the presence of God.

I say to all of you – every one of us needs to work at this – and if the clergy are not teaching you to do it, then complain to them!

And remember – you do still have one mouth, and when life is tough, be honest with Jesus about your struggles, your hopes and fears, even your failures. He understands. He can take it.

Most of all he wants you to be honest with him – and when you open to him your true, warts and all, self, he will touch your deepest needs, and lead you onwards.

Of course, we cannot be Christians praying and acting in isolation.

This is why God gives us brothers and sisters in Christ, the guidance of Holy Scripture, the nourishment and strengthening of regularly receiving Holy Communion, and the framework of the worshipping community of the Church – to help us confirm, or otherwise, what we think we have heard in our prayers, and to interpret what it might mean in our own lives and circumstances.

God gives us one another as members together of the body of Christ, so we can build one another up, encourage one another, and together share in complimentary ways – each according to our specific gifts and callings – in God’s mission to God’s world.

And, to return to our parable, even though sometimes it can be frustrating to walk our own path while others seem to be called on easier Christian journeys, we will find that there is nothing more satisfying in life, than listening to our own call from Jesus, 'follow me'.

When he says that we must take up our crosses and follow after him, I often feel that actually, the most painful cross is to dare to become our true selves, as God creates, redeems, and calls us to be.

So, dear confirmation candidates, do not be afraid to commit yourselves to the unknown journey ahead.

God is faithful and true, and fulfils his purposes.

He has good things in store for you, and, in Christ, through the power of the Spirit, he will be your companion every step of the journey ahead – even if, as always happens to each of us from time to time, you sometimes wander from the route he would prefer.

He will not abandon you, and will always help you find your way back to the best path, the path that he has especially picked out as the best one for you.

So anchor yourself in Christ – and know that though the path ahead may be difficult, with your hand in his, it will be the best adventure imaginable; and at the end will lie, not one full day's wage, but rather, all the immeasurable riches of heaven.

May it be so.

Amen.