

Archbishop of Cape Town Calls for the Return of Police "Services"

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South Africa's Police should be renamed as 'Services', and the word 'Force' should be dropped, the Archbishop of Cape Town said, in his Easter Sermon.

Preaching at St George's Cathedral, Cape Town, at the Easter Vigil Service on Saturday night, Dr Thabo Makgoba called for the police to be consciously focused on delivering 'safety and security', and other 'life-affirming' action. In contrast, to speak of 'force' was too often to 'maim and kill' and be 'wrapped in brutality'.

The Archbishop challenged South Africans to consider what it means to 'meet the risen Jesus in Galilee', through following Jesus' example in their own lives. He spoke of his discomfort at having 'to walk alongside wealth-creators or others whom power has corrupted, in order to challenge them' to live by Jesus' standards, as well as being pastor to the poor and needy, and promoting care of God's world.

Dr Makgoba highlighted Jesus' call for reconciliation and forgiveness, even with those we consider our enemies, in the light of Andries Tatane's killing, and his own subsequent visit to Ficksburg. He repeated his call for the President and senior Ministers to go and apologise publicly for the unjustifiable violence as well as for the appalling conditions against which residents had demonstrated, and to make concrete improvements in housing and service delivery. While insisting that those responsible for Andries Tatane's death must face justice, he also called for a process of forgiveness, and, as part of this, encouraged South Africans to demand the change in name for the police.

The Archbishop said people should take to heart the risen Jesus' call 'Do not be afraid', and should be 'fearless' in demanding proper service delivery, especially for 'the needs of the needy and the poorest of the poor', and in opposing corruption. Everyone should be courageous in using their vote to call elected representatives to meet their promises and obligations.

The full text of the Archbishop's Sermon follows below. Please note that the Archbishop's reflections on his visit to Ficksburg, his Easter letter, and other recent statements can be found on his blog at <http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org>.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

May I speak in the name of God, who raised Jesus, His Son, from the dead. Amen. Dear Friends in Christ, dear sisters and brothers at St George's Cathedral – the Peoples' Cathedral – Jesus has been raised indeed. Alleluia! We gather on this most Holy Night to acclaim and affirm that Jesus the Son of God was crucified for the sake of the World, and rose to new life, to break the power of death and bring redemptive hope to all humanity and to all of God's creation. This is the Easter message and story – a celebration of new life which is always awaiting us. A gift of eternal life won through His victory over the cross – a gift which is always there, ready for us to unwrap.

As St Paul writes, 'Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his' (Romans 6:4-5). Thus, Jesus, by his cross and resurrection, has freed us from the slavery of sin, broken the chains of death, and opened the way to heaven, where in the Lord's presence, there is fullness of joy and delight for evermore (Psalm 16:11).

So, in St Matthew's gospel, we read how Jesus says, 'Do not be afraid, go and tell my brothers (sisters) to go to Galilee; there they will see me' (Matthew 28:10). Galilee was the centre of his earthly activities and ministries, where people were healed, fed, taught and comforted, and where the marginalised were incorporated and the authorities challenged. He invites us also to go there – 'there you will see me.' We must ask ourselves, what might your Galilee be and mean to you today – Galilee, a place for Jesus' context and ministry? Where might Jesus be inviting you to go to today?

Since being Archbishop, I have felt constantly called to be a pastor, to come alongside others in their pain or despair as they face the forces of death and destruction, to affirm them and sometimes challenge their learnt helplessness. I have been called as well, to care for God's planet, as it grieves the loss of its integrity and respect through the insatiable appetites of a greedy few when the majority go hungry, and too many die due to lack of food, water and energy and basic needs such as sanitation. I have also been called – though at times I feel uncomfortable about this – to walk alongside the wealth creators or others whom power has absolutely corrupted, in order to challenge them and mirror the demands of God in Jesus Christ unveiled in the Galilee. I have been constantly called to write and reflect on what might constitute the common good, human flourishing and human dignity and as well as the integrity of God's creation – or the reign of God in the now and here.

Let me share one example of what reflected my Galilee, this Holy Week – a context and ministry where Christ may have said, tell my brother, the Archbishop, to go there and 'there he will see me.' The protest in which police turned water cannons on Ficksburg residents has been such a place – where the police bizarrely drenched locals with gallons of water when they could not get it from their taps. This behaviour should set alarm bells ringing in dysfunctional towns across South Africa.

The story is that of Andries Tatane, a teacher and community worker, and his fellow community members who were demanding simply that justice be done. They wanted to be treated with dignity, to have water and proper toilets instead of the bucket system. They went to present a petition to their elected representatives but were met with disproportionate police force. Andries Tatane had to pay with his life to get the attention of his elected leaders.

The resurrected Jesus says to the Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, 'Do not be afraid' (Matthew 28:1ff). Perhaps, He says to you and me and the residents of Meqheleng and others - fear not! Continue the work in this Galilee of challenging authorities, say to Minister Sicelo Shiceka, visit Ficksburg and see the appalling conditions under which God's people live. Minister Tokyo Sexwale visit, also and tell the community what you are doing about their housing. Minister Nathi Mthethwa and President Zuma, publicly apologise for the acts of aggression of the police, and say that the senior officers responsible for the police who killed Andries should face justice too.

Equally and more challenging for us as Christians, as Bishop Anthony said yesterday (and as echoed by Fr Terry and Fr Clive, in their informative and inspiring meditations during the Good Friday Three Hour Service), let us go to our Galilee and learn to forgive even our killers, those who persecute you, even the police who killed Andries. I want to add to their call of yesterday, today's gospel injunction - do not be afraid! Do not be afraid to make forgiveness a process, wherein the wronged encounter the wrong-doer and together tell their part, and together discover the forgiving and restoring Christ waiting for them both. Forgiveness cannot be a one way process.

I therefore, encourage all of us, the Tatane family, the residents in Meqheleng, to affirm and call for a renaming of our police services back to 'safety and security' and not a police 'force', for this force seems to maim and kill rather than offer safety and security. Our Police Force is not life affirming. Nor is it wrapped in life giving behaviour – ready for us to unwrap and find abundant life. It seems to be wrapped with brutality and force which Christ overcame by his death on the Cross. Perhaps part of this forgiving process would be to urge their elected leaders to provide new, better homes and living conditions for the people of Ficksburg and also for the poorest of the poor across our country. But to expect the poor to yet again understand whilst the political elite kill and enrich themselves at the poor's expense, will betray the true forgiveness Christ calls for.

The point of Easter is that Jesus, the Son of God, was crucified for the sake of the world, and rose to new life, to break the power of death, oppression, deceit, tyranny and to bring abundant life, redemptive hope to all humanity and to God's creation. By his death and resurrection, Jesus unveils for us a Living Hope and fearlessness in demanding that we be served by our elected leaders as we too serve others. I pray we too may come to know our responsibilities to one another. Perhaps this murder may be a positive outcome of the very public nature of this violent tragedy – that we may turn our outrage into actions – actions which will lead to better lives for all our sisters and brothers who still suffer from the indignities which failed delivery of basic services imposes on their lives.

We can all begin by taking our upcoming local elections seriously. In our voting may we prayerfully consider - who will get the job done? And once the elections have taken place and our elected leaders are in place, let us demand leadership with results – especially for the poorest of the poor. They have listened to promises for too long. And those of us who are privileged to have basic services and more - we cannot be silent any longer. We are one family – God's family – and we have responsibilities to one another.

In my Easter monthly letter, I said, 'People's lives are at stake, as we face local elections in May, we must never forget this, especially as we decide how to vote. Will we choose life for all, or opulence for some at the expense of others? We are not a rich country, but what we have should be enough to go round. Everyone should have

proper food, shelter, fresh drinking water and sanitation. Every child should have access to a decent education. Affordable, adequate health care should be available to everyone.' We also need to care for our planet, our earthly home, for it does not have limitless resources of water, food and energy.

This is the Galilee which Jesus calls us to be fearless in standing for, both in words and action. Go and spread this Easter message and do likewise. God calls on all of us, on political parties, politicians, business people, to go to our Galilee and to serve him, and to serve the people of this nation and his broken world: to put the needs of the needy first, especially the poorest of the poor. To bring good news to the poor, loving our neighbours as ourselves, and treating others as we would like to be treated. To have time for the outcasts – the excluded and unimportant people of our day – remembering that every human being is made in the image of God, and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect.

As we join in acclamations, saying He is risen indeed, let us ensure that God's good purposes for humanity find expression and fulfilment through us – that the Easter promise of abundant life that Jesus won for us on the cross may be known by all and felt by his creation too. Happy Easter!

Reference: Matthew 28:1-10

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