

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Kwini House Blessing and Eucharist
18 February 2012

Sermon at the Eucharist, following the House Blessing and ‘family speakers’ – for Dr Mlungisi and Dr Miranda Kwini.

Jas 3:1-12; Ps 12; Mk 9:2-13

James 3:1-12

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

Mark 9:2-13

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. Then Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!’ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. Then they asked him, ‘Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’ He said to them, ‘Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him.’

- 'Free will' is at the heart of what it means to be human – God creates us with the capacity to choose; and places us in a world with vast capacity for choice.
- As the letter of St James underlines, we can use the capacity to choose for good, or for evil; to heal or to harm; to build up or to destroy. It's up to us.
- The tongue itself is neither good nor bad. It's how we choose to speak that matters.
- The same is true of so much else in the world. Of themselves, money, power, influence, status, are neither good nor bad. It's how we use them that matters.
- To echo St James, we can use them to bless God, and God's children and God's world – or we can use them for our narrow self-interest, regardless of others.
- Today we have celebrated the blessing of this wonderful new home.
- The introduction in the service book reminds us that 'all good things we have are a gift from God...' adding that 'the Church sets apart things which God has given us for our use, to remind us that they are gifts of which we are his stewards.'
- We therefore bless a house 'to show that it is a home where God is to be loved and honoured, and where the visitor will be welcomed in the love of Christ.' In this, as the service book puts it 'we take possession of the building for God, that it may be filled with the life and love of Christ, and that those who live [*and work*] there may live in his strength, under his protection, and for his glory.'
- And therefore, in blessing this new house, we are saying far, far more than merely asking for some sort of 'holy good luck' on these bricks and mortar.
- Rather, this service conveys the deliberate choice of Mlungisi and Miranda that not only their house, but they themselves – their whole lives, both at home and at work – are dedicated wholly in the service of God.
- It is an acknowledgement that all they are (with their abilities, their intellectual capacities, their experiences, their achievements) and all they do (in and through their families, their friends, their social and business contacts, their work and all the opportunities that come their way) – all of these are a gift from God.
- And so today, they rededicate themselves to continue walking in God's ways: they asked to be blessed so they may live and work to share his blessings with others.
- All of us can do this – whatever our gifts. If we dedicate ourselves to God, he will use us powerfully, whether or not we are powerful in the eyes of the world.
- We should all seek to live lives that are shaped by the life of Jesus Christ, our dear brother, our Saviour, our Lord – open to be transformed to become more like him.
- Then we shall reflect him – and others will see the glory of his transfiguration, of which our gospel spoke – and come to know him as Lord, Saviour, too.