Archbishop Dr Thabo Makgoba

Diocese of Johannesburg – 90th Anniversary

'Practise of Ministry of all Believers'

'Poelano – Coming Back Together'

24 June 2012

---

2 Sam 5:1-12; 2 Cor 5:18-6:2; Mk 4:35-41

'We are ambassadors for Christ.'

Dear Bishop Brian, dear People of God of the Diocese of Johannesburg, dear sisters and brothers in Christ, what a delight it is to share in today's celebration!

Thank you for your invitation to preach and preside today.

Thank you for the invitation to 'come home', to the Diocese:

- of my birth and my baptism,
- of my raising and my confirmation,
- of my answering the call to ordination, and
- of my journey into the priesthood, that has now taken me to the far end of the country.

I have to say, I love it there – but it is also so very good to come home!

Thank you for making me and my family so welcome.

I know that at the end of the service, there will be a formal vote of thanks.

But let me also add my own gratitude to the large team, both evident in this service, and in preparations and behind the scenes.

And, dear Brian – dear brother Bishop and dear friend – especial thanks to you, for all you have been, for all you have done. May God bless you richly as you prepare to retire, and in all that lies ahead.

Yet, most of all, today, our thanks are to God – for his great faithfulness to us, through 90 long years.

This Diocese was formed from the Diocese of Pretoria in 1922.

This city, this country, has seen remarkable changes since then.

In good times and in bad, our God has been our strength and our hope.

There have been times when we have known all too vividly, the need for great endurance, such as recounted by St Paul: in 'afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights and hunger'.

Yes, this Diocese and its people have seen all of these.

There have been times when we felt like those disciples in that storm-tossed boat – when we wanted Jesus to wake up, and focus on our suffering; and to bring us instant and total relief.

Perhaps we too worried that he did not really care – that he was content to sleep through all that threatened to overwhelm us.

But today we look back, and we see that Jesus was there for us.

We look back and we recognise God's hand at work.

We look back and we give thanks for the courage and strength that he gave us.

For all of this, we, the people of the Diocese of Johannesburg, give our grateful thanks.

And now, let me speak not as a son of this Diocese, but as one who now looks in from outside – let me speak from the perspective of the rest of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa.

On your ninetieth birthday, we too express our deep gratitude.

For we also have much to thank God for, as we thank you for all you have been, and for all you have given: to the rest of this Province, and indeed to the Anglican Communion worldwide and to the whole ministry of God's people to God's world.

We give thanks for great church leaders – not least those courageous Bishops who travelled from here to Cape Town: Geoffrey Clayton, remembered as Bulldog; and Desmond Tutu, our dear 'Emeritus', of whom I am sure all of us still first think when we hear people refer to 'the Arch'!

And of course, other sons and daughters of this Diocese have found their way across our Province, and our Communion, and made a godly difference.

Thank you, for them, and for their abilities and gifts which you have nurtured, and then freely shared.

Thank you also, for the many people – raised, and then resourced within our churches – who have gone on to play, and continue to play, significant roles beyond our walls.

Thank you also for all those who have been leaders in the struggle, leaders in shaping this new nation, leaders in politics and in business, in academia and the media, in civil society and in every conceivable walk of life.

We give thanks to you all; and we give thanks to God for you all.

Yet above all, whether we are from this Diocese or beyond, we give thanks today that God's word to us remains steadfast and true, for the future as well as for the past.

As we look into an unknown future, once again we must hear Jesus' reassurance that we need not be afraid.

He does not turn his back on us or abandon us in times of difficulty.

We have achieved so much, and come so far, but we know that the challenges that lie before us remain great, and in many ways are very different from what we faced before.

The hardships of today are both similar and different to those of the past.

Under democracy, poverty tragically persists, and is felt in every avenue of life: especially in housing, education, health, sanitation, employment …

But today the dynamics of poverty are often different from in the past.

Most shocking of all, inequality is worsening; and we seem content to stand by and allow this to happen through the socio-economic systems we are promoting.

Freedom has brought us choice – but the powerful do not always use it wisely or well.

Too often narrow self-interest and greed are given free rein; and too many have lost sight – or chosen to ignore – the vision for which so many strove for so long, at such great cost, even at the cost of their lives.

What is our answer?

It is that we should all be 'ambassadors for Christ'.

It does not matter whether we are clergy or laity; whether our lives are mostly lived within the community of faith, or we find ourselves called to be salt and light in the world.

Sharing Christ, is our central task, so others may encounter him, and find his answers to all the important questions of life.

This is the same ‘ministry of all believers’ in which every Christian shares.

So we need Jesus at the centre of our lives.

And as we battle whatever the challenges we face, we also need what St Paul describes as the ‘weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left’.

If we are to overcome the evils of poverty in all its forms, the evil of greed and selfishness that result in the exploitation of the poor, the weak, the powerless, the voiceless, the marginalised, the excluded – then we need God’s weapons, of ‘purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God.’

These will help and guide us, wherever God calls us.

Perhaps it will be in initiatives through the churches – such as the Vuleka schools.

We can also be partners with others. For example, I have just been in the United States, promoting ‘the Archbishop’s Global Economic Indaba’.

Through local and international partners, this aims to foster a global network not only for dialogue on economic emancipation of the poor, but for practical means of empowering them to participate in economic activities, particularly through small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs).

We hope this will have a greater social impact, improving health, education, and access to skills, and will be of especial help to young people, who often have such great potential and initiative.

More locally, we have the Y-AGE programme for training and mentoring young entrepreneurs in Gauteng, in which Hope Africa is working with the Department of Economic Development and various private sector partners.

(And let me here encourage young people to consider signing up for this!)

Or perhaps it will be through the contacts and influences that you already have – through work, in schools and colleges, in communities and neighbourhoods, wherever you happen to find yourselves.

And I hope that all of us will encourage one another in finding effective ways of overcoming the terrible gulf between rich and poor – a gulf which pains me deeply. All Anglicans should also work in whatever ways we can to bridge the gap in practical ways.

Finally, wherever you are, remember, Jesus Christ is Lord of all – wind and waves, and all the universe obey him.

Every day is a day of promise – a day when we can share and know and experience his salvation, his redemption, his best answer to the struggles of humanity.

So today, we give thanks for all that has been, and we go forward, in confidence, as ambassadors for Christ.