

Sunday 29th July 2012 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		17th Sunday of the Year B Celebration & Thanksgiving – Stouts’ ministry Installation of Andrew-John Bethke as Director of Music
2 Sam 12:1-14	Ps 32	Ephesians 3:14-21
		John 6:1-15
Roots and foundations in the love of God		

“I pray ... that with deep roots and firm foundations you may ... have the power to grasp ... the depth of Christ’s love...” (Eph 3:17f)

Over the past two Sundays, we have been exploring the Vision for us as Anglicans in Southern Africa. We seek to be an “ACT” Church: Anchored in the love of Christ, Committed to God’s Mission, and Transformed by the Holy Spirit. Part of our Mission Statement as Anglicans includes the following: “Across the diverse countries and cultures of our region, we seek *to honour God in worship that feeds and empowers us for faithful witness and service.*”

So it is appropriate today, on this Sunday of Celebration and Thanksgiving, that we give thanks for our life of music and worship: for Christopher Cockburn and Philip Burnett; for Penny Whitford and her wonderful teams of marimba players; for Peter Breetzke on the organ; for all our musicians; for our choir. In particular today we give thanks for the ministry of Barbara and Wilf Stout as Director of Music and Organist respectively. We shall also be formally installing and commissioning Andrew-John Bethke as Cathedral Director of Music. We pray that we shall continue to honour God in worship that feeds and empowers us.

The letter to the Ephesians

Most of the younger generation use cell-phones, bbm, whatsapp, twitter, and facebook to communicate. Letters – pen and paper and ink – are history. Gone are the days when we waited for the post to arrive.

Now we wait for the ping of our cell phones to know that someone is writing to us. But whether via cellphone or pen and paper, we want to hear from those who are important in our lives.

Paul wrote his letters to the churches to encourage them in their understanding of the gospel, and in their life together. His letter to the Ephesians has been described as “the gospel of the church”¹. He begins his letter by showing how God in Christ has brought our broken world together. The result of the great work of healing is that we become part of the body of Christ. We share in worship, witness and service.

Some people say, “I believe in God, I am a Christian, but I don’t go to church. I don’t need the Christian community.” But that is to miss a large part of what God has done in Christ. We belong to one another and we share our lives, not because we are facebook friends, or greet in Pick n Pay, but because God has broken down the barriers that divided us. We have been reconciled.

Roots and foundation in the love of God

St Paul prays that we may be rooted and grounded in love, and grasp the depths of Christ’s love. He prays this because he knows that we shall need it. We might want to achieve great things, but if we are not rooted in love for one another, and love for God, we may destroy and break down what it is we hope to build.

These verses, this prayer, are sometimes read at a marriage service. But it is primarily a prayer for the Christian community. Just as Paul prayed it for the people of God at Ephesus, today it is our prayer for the Cathedral. For our choir and musicians. For our PCC. For us all. May we be rooted and grounded in love. May we have the power to comprehend the love that has reconciled us and made us one. Because the church at Ephesus, like the people of God here in the Cathedral,

¹ Stott, J., *God’s New Society*, 9

was made up of people from all over. For them, it was Jews and Greeks, people of different languages and cultures. For us, it is black and white, English and Afrikaans and Xhosa, and Sotho and Tswana and Zulu and all the languages and cultures of our rainbow nation and beyond. Zimbabwe, Uganda, India, Malawi, Kenya, Nigeria. Even Cape Town. People from all over walk through these doors and are welcome here. But we are here together, in one place, as one community, because we belong as one family.

And as the Cathedral we share this space with, and welcome, the family of the diocese. This is not “our” church. This is the mother church of the diocese. And so we are often the hosts who welcome others and make them feel at home.

And just as Jews and Gentiles in the early church had to learn to live together and to love one another, just as they had to discover that the gospel of Jesus Christ reconciled them and broke down the barriers that divided them, so that has been our journey and our discovery also. We come together, many of us, bruised and scarred by our history, damaged and twisted and wounded by our troubled past. We are a wounded community, wounded healers. Yet we have been brought together by the one who Himself “was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5)

That is why Paul prayed for the Ephesians – may you be rooted and grounded in love – and that is our prayer for the Cathedral community, for the people of God. May we be rooted and grounded in love.

Years later, St John, in his Revelation on the island of Patmos, had this to say about the church in Ephesus: “you have abandoned the love you had at first.” (Rev 2:4). You have lost your early love – love for one another, love for God. “I know your works, your toil, your patient endurance” – but where is your love?

What are the signs, the marks, of love? It is love that opens doors. It is love that lifts up the down-trodden. It is love that reaches out to those who are excluded. It is love that seeks to understand. It is love that longs to be reconciled. It is love that creates a garden in the desert. It is love that embraces our differences and is enriched by our diversity. And it is love that plants seeds in the lives of young people and gives them a future.

The Stouts

That is what so many here in Grahamstown have done over the years, and that is what Barbara and Wilf Stout have done in their time here. They have planted seeds in the lives of others, especially the lives of our young choristers. We thank them for their hard work, generosity, and immense commitment of time and personal resources, during their four years as Director of Music and Cathedral Organist, respectively. What a gift they have been to our music and life of worship, with the establishment of the Cathedral Choir School, the recruitment of our wonderful young choristers, the introduction of a wide range of contemporary music, exciting stuff during the Spiritfest Eucharists, some wonderful concerts; their laughter, friendship, humour, energy, vision, and initiative. We acknowledged their contribution by naming them Spiritfest Guests of Honour for 2012. On a personal note, they have been wonderful family friends to the Hunter family and especially to our daughters.

Barbara and Wilf, you have helped us to honour God in worship that feeds and empowers us. Today you are passing on the baton – or in this case, the organist's surplice – to our newly appointed Director Music, Dr Andrew-John Bethke, whom we formally welcome and install today. We celebrate all that has been achieved.

CONCLUSION

Let's continue to ask God to guide and renew the church in our love for Him and in our love for one another.

“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.” (Eph 3:20-21)