

<b>Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> November 2012</b> <b>Cathedral, Grahamstown</b> <b>7 p.m.</b>		<b>32<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Year B</b> <b>Remembrance Sunday</b> <b>Student Leavers service</b>	
1 Kings 17:8-16	Ps 146	Heb 9:24-28	
		Mark 12:38-44	
<b>Thanksgiving</b>			

“I don’t do goodbyes easily.” (Archbishop Thabo, at ACC). I have been approaching tonight, and this student leavers’ service, almost with dread and disbelief – surely you can’t be leaving already? Are you going so soon? I am aware of just how much we have been blessed by you, our very dear students, our leavers. We are here to give thanks for the year that is nearly over, for the years at Rhodes that are coming to an end for some, and to pray for you as we send you out.

### **A time to remember**

Today, this evening, is a time to remember. At 11 o’ clock this morning, here on Church Square, just outside the Cathedral, men and women in uniform gathered for the annual Remembrance Day parade. This is a tradition that goes back to the end of World War One. The armistice – the end of the war – came into effect on the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month, 1918 – and that moment has been observed since then, with a two-minute silence, and with the laying of wreaths at war memorials. It is a time to remember, with sadness, all who have died in battle in the two great wars of last century, and in all other conflicts, and to give thanks for their lives.

The service includes these words, from a poem by Laurence Binyon:

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn,  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them.*

And everybody echoes that last line: “*We will remember them.*”

It is one of the saddest days of the year, and deeply moving – a time to remember, a time to grieve – the immense loss of human life, suffering and destruction caused by war; a time to remember those who fought and died in the hope for freedom, for a better world; a time to acknowledge our own struggles as a country, the blood shed – including years of conflict here in the Eastern Cape, Frontier Country; a time to remember and acknowledge those who left the country to join uMkhonto weSizwe and the armed struggle; a time to remember and acknowledge the conscription years in SA which white men of my generation went through.

It is a time to heal the wounds, the scars, that many carry – that spill over into the very violent society in which we live, the high rate of domestic violence, the violent crime, the anger, which is a sad and crippling part of our country.

It is time, as Fr Michael Lapsley puts it, to redeem the past, so that we may build a future together.

All Christians are called by Jesus Christ to

“go into the world and make disciples of all people, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matt 28:19-20) These words of Jesus, just before his Ascension, are called “The Great Commission”.

They are often linked to the words from Isaiah which Jesus reads at the start of his public ministry:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me; he has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let the broken

victims go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18-19 – from Isaiah 61:1-2)

We hear in these words of Jesus the call to go and make a difference – to be signs of Christ, signs of the presence of God, in the world.

As Anglicans we have “Five Marks of Mission” – five pointers which help to shape and define this calling. Briefly, they are the call to *Tell, Teach, Tend, Transform, and Treasure*. Tell others of the good news of Jesus Christ. Teach the faith to new believers. Tend and care for those in need. Transform unjust structures of society. Treasure the earth and all creation.

On Remembrance Sunday, as we acknowledge the millions who have died when people go to war, we ask – how do we transform what is wrong or unjust in our society, in our world? Remembrance Sunday acknowledges that people have often turned to violence to bring about change, to defend themselves, to protect and guard what is theirs. But when the fighting is over, we have to pick up the pieces and build the peace, make peace, live together in peace.

Even as we speak, people are trying to pick up the pieces after Marikana, and to make peace in De Doorns in the Hex River Valley, with the violent protests that are taking place there.

## **Our Gospel reading**

We have a strange Gospel reading for Remembrance Sunday, and for a Leavers Service – the warning about the religious leaders with their outward show of holiness; and the story of the widow's mite - the contrast of the rich who gave out of their abundance, and the widow who gave all that she had to live on.

But it is the Gospel reading set for today, for Anglicans and other Christians all over the world – and it reminds us that we are part of this great flowing river of worship and life, that we are joined with

others, that we are part of the body of Christ, the family of believers. What is this Gospel saying to us today, at our Leavers service?

Jesus speaks critically about the religious leaders who liked to parade around in their long robes – fortunately I am not wearing mine this evening - receiving the respectful greetings on the streets and places of honour at the feasts. It is a warning about having the outward signs of holiness that are not matched with hearts of worship and love and holiness; it is a warning about seeking status. We expect to see you, our leavers, at grad in April next year, and celebrating your wonderful achievements, as you wear your long graduation robes, and receive the admiring glances of others as you walk up High Street to the Grad Tea in front of the admin block, and hear the greetings of your families – “Our graduate! Congratulations!”

*It is* wonderful. Your hard work will pay off. We would not want it otherwise. But don't lose the spirit and the heart of service. Beware the trap of power and wealth going to your head. Remember the sacrifices and generosity and hard work of parents and others who have made your achievements possible. Give back something of what you have received. Bless others as you have been blessed.

Then we have the contrast that Jesus notes, as he watches the people giving into the temple treasury - between the rich who give out of their abundance, and the poor widow who gives very little, but it is actually everything that she has. This is a bit more complicated. We know how money, generosity, can open doors, pay university fees, buy a laptop or a car, provide food, pay clergy stipends, train our future leaders. I acknowledge how much I long for people who have resources to be generous, so that the life and mission of the church can go forward. Generous giving makes so much possible – care for the poor, a new cathedral sound system, supporting child-headed households, helping flood victims.

The cathedral student ministry has been blessed by the support and generosity of the Cathedral community. So I urge you to be generous,

to give in return, sacrificially, to help those in need, to support your local church with your giving. Your giving makes a difference to the lives of others.

And the gifts not only of your hard-earned cash, but of your time and talents, your skills – everyone here is immensely gifted, able, well-educated, talented, with so much to offer. Let us use the gifts we have to transform, to tend, to treasure, to tell, and to teach – those five marks of mission I mentioned earlier. There is no higher calling.

But – and this is the uncomfortable part of the story – Jesus notices and sees the heart of the giver. He sees the small gift that comes from the heart, the generosity and utter trust of the poor widow. The Lord sees and knows our hearts.

Like the widow, there may be times when we think we have little to offer, when we are a small fish in a big pond, when we seem helpless to make a difference, when what we have to offer seems insignificant in the face of the mountain we have to climb, the school we have to sort out, the department that is dysfunctional, the firm that is corrupt, the family that is at logger-heads, the farm that is going down the tube, the community that is unemployed, the church that is stagnant. We offer what we have. We offer who we are. We give to God our hearts, our lives, in trust and in faith, for Him to use.

May we have the heart, the eyes, of Christ – who sees the widow, the poor, the insignificant, those on the margins. Jesus looked beyond the rich and powerful to see the small actions that are signs of the true heart, the heart that loves God.

## **Farewell and thanks**

Leavers – our dear brothers and sisters, students, who we are sending out – it is into this troubled and complex society that we are sending you – to be signs of Christ, carriers of the good news of God's love, instruments for transformation, for reconciliation. Just as you have

discovered the presence of Christ here at Rhodes, here in Grahamstown, here at the Cathedral, so you go to discover the presence of Christ in whatever awaits you. You may be anxious and uncertain and eager and excited and happy and sad – perhaps a bit like you felt when you arrived here in Grahamstown, a few years ago. And you will realise that God has gone before you.

I began by speaking of Remembrance Sunday: a time to remember. This is our time to remember, not with sadness, but with immense, heart-felt thanksgiving, for the gift you our leavers have been to us. We look back with thanksgiving; we look around with love and appreciation for the rich relationships, the caring community. We look forward with hope for what you will become, how God will shape you and use you.

A special thank-you to Andy Kruger, who has been an immense gift to the student ministry these past two years; to Heather, the outgoing chair – and we wish them well as they prepare for their wedding in January. Thanks to the members of the Core team who are leaving and who have been such stars.

We thank you, we thank God for you, we send you on your way with heavy hearts, but with great love.

You have been an immense blessing to us, to our family, to our daughters, to many here at the Cathedral; to Amasango and Brookshaw; to the community around us.

## **CONCLUSION**

May the Lord bless and strengthen you in your life and your journey as God's beloved children, in all that lies ahead. God bless you.