

Sunday 18th August 2013 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		Theological Education Sunday (13th Sunday after Pentecost)
Isaiah 55:6-11	Psalm 84	Colossians 1:24-29
		Luke 5:1-11
Theological Education Sunday		

“Jesus said to Simon, ‘Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch.’” (Luke 5:4)

Today throughout Southern Africa, we as Anglicans are observing this Sunday as Theological Education Sunday. We are setting aside this Sunday to pray for the life and work of the College of the Transfiguration, here in Grahamstown. We are showing our support for leadership training in our church. We are invited to give – and to give at least R10 each, from every Anglican in southern Africa, young and old – in order to endow the College of the Transfiguration, and to enable it to do its vital work.

Our support for the College of the Transfiguration

Why is this important? Why support the College? Why support the training and development of our future spiritual leaders?

There are many answers to that, but I simply want to say that any organisation that does not devote energy and resources to training its leaders is being very short-sighted. We want our future leaders – our priests and bishops - to be the best they can be, and we want to equip them for the job and ministry. Part of the task of the ordained ministry is, in the words of the Ordinal, to “help God’s people to discover and use to his glory the gifts he has given them.”¹ This is a vision for “every member ministry”. By supporting the training of ordinands at the College of the Transfiguration, we are supporting the life and future of our church.

¹ *An Anglican Prayer Book*, pg 587

In a recent letter to us all, Archbishop Thabo used the example of St Barnabas, the apostle who we remember for his wonderful gift of encouragement (Acts 11:22-24). The Archbishop wrote:

“We ... can encourage the ministry of those whom God is calling to be set apart for his special work within the church, and especially those called to be ordained. Like St Barnabas, all of us can play a role in helping the church to recognise those to whom God gives this special vocation.

“And like St Barnabas, we can also help ensure that this ministry is not only recognised, but mentored and supported – until those who are called are sufficiently well trained to be able to lead God’s people without that close oversight, but as part of the broader network of Christians sharing in leadership of the Church.

“Unlike St Barnabas, we don’t have to do all this ourselves! We are privileged to have the College of the Transfiguration (COTT) in Grahamstown, as a place to which we can send those the church discerns are called by God, so they can be well trained to serve as our clergy. Lay leaders may also be trained alongside them.

“Theological Education is one of the key priorities of the Vision and Mission Statement of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. For without well-trained clergy and lay ministers, the well-being of our congregations, and the ability of all God’s people to live lives of faithful worship, witness and service (as we pledge to do at our confirmation) is seriously undermined. Indeed, our whole future is put at risk.”²

Let us give generously, and in thanksgiving, for ministry received, and in support of ministry that is to come.

² *To the Laos*, 20th June 2013

The word which gives life

Our scripture readings given to us this morning speak to us in words of promise and hope. They tell us of God who is involved in the big and small things of our lives; God who is present in all things and in every circumstance; God who calls us out of our fishing boats, out of our familiar places, into deep waters, to follow him.

“Seek the Lord while he is present, call to him while he is close at hand...” (Isaiah 55:6)

“As the rain and snow come down from the heavens and do not return there without watering the earth... so is it with my word issuing from my mouth; it will not return to me empty without accomplishing my purpose and succeeding in the task for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10f).

There is a rhythm to this, there is timing, there is the reminder to trust, to wait, to hang in there, because God’s will and God’s word will not be stopped or prevented or thwarted. You and I are called to be people who are looking and praying and waiting, consciously discerning the hand and presence of God in what is happening. And to rest in the assurance that God has not walked away from us, or turned his back on us.

“Blessed is the one whose strength is in you: in whose heart are the highways to Zion; who going through the valley of dryness finds there a spring from which to drink: till the autumn rain shall clothe it with blessings.” (Psalm 84:5-6) – the image of the pilgrim, the faithful disciple, who finds water in the desert, food in the wilderness – because God has provided what is needed.

The Apostle Paul who “toils strenuously with all the energy and power of Christ at work in me.” (Col 1:29) – the example of one who works as hard as possible, while depending on the strength of Christ – because it is Christ who we proclaim (Col 1:28). The example for every priest, pastor, minister, leader in the life of the church.

The call of Jesus to the fishermen (Lk 5:1-11) to cast their nets into the deep water – to try again, to move away from the shallow familiar places, to leave their places of comfort, to go deeper – the call of Christ to move into deep waters, to get involved in the big complex issues, with lives of faith and trust and obedience.

Good theology

This past week has been traumatic and difficult for many here in Grahamstown, with the water outage. Further afield, rioting in Egypt has seen many killed, and numerous attacks on churches and places of Christian worship. This past Friday was also the first anniversary of the Marikana killings. And there are those amongst us who are carrying their own loads and long for relief and light and hope.

To be involved in these big issues – conflict, injustice, political change – is to throw our nets into deep waters, like the fishermen in the gospel reading. It is to ask the hard questions, to face the uncomfortable things. As one bishop said, “When I helped the poor with food parcels and clothing, people called me a saint. When I began to ask why people were poor, and badly housed, and badly paid, people called me a revolutionary and told me to stop interfering in politics.” Deep waters – when we move beyond muttering in our homes about the lack of water, and take to the streets in protest; when we get involved in a rates boycott to protest the lack of service delivery.

The word of God that will accomplish the purposes of God – where do we see this happening? Where is God in the crises faced this past week?

God is at work in situations of conflict through those who pray and work for peace, for an end to violence, for democracy, for the healing of communities – and so our prayers are with the bishops and clergy of the church in Egypt, and all religious leaders.

God is at work through those who work honestly and with integrity in local government, or to fix the water pumps, or who marched and protested this past week. God is present in those who are involved in the Marikana investigation – and these include the chair of the Commission of Enquiry, Judge Ian Farlam, a faithful Anglican. God is present in and through those who are seeking a fair deal for everyone at Lonmin platinum mines, and so we pray for Bishop Jo Seoka and others from the SACC, together with leaders of labour and industry.

God is present when we reach out to the desolate, to the lonely, to the homesick, to those in need.

To think about God and God's people, to ask questions about what it means to love our neighbour, to seek to be a faithful witness to Christ and help one another through water shortages, through riots, through religious conflict – to think about God and God's world and our place in it – is to do theology. Theology is how we speak and think about God. It is what we believe, and how we behave. There is good theology – theology that sets people free, theology that opens the doors of our minds, theology that opens our hearts to one another, theology that challenges and shakes us and transforms us, theology that leads us to find water in the desert, theology that leads us to cast our nets into the deep waters. There is bad theology – theology that makes others out to be enemies, theology that blinds us to the needs of others, theology that keeps us prisoners.

CONCLUSION

On this Theological Education Sunday, let's give generously, come the offertory, to the work of the College of the Transfiguration. And may you and I respond to the call of Christ to cast our nets into the deep waters, the invitation to go deeper into God's love and God's will; as we journey, let us have eyes that find water in the desert; let's continue to trust that God will fulfil his purpose in and through us, as we leave everything to follow him.