

<b>Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2013</b> <b>Grahamstown Cathedral</b> <b>7.30 &amp; 9.30 a.m.</b>		<b>21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost</b> <b>28<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year C</b>
Jer 29:1, 4-7	Psalm 66:1-12	2 Timothy 2:8-15
		Luke 17:11-19
<b>BE A BLESSING</b>		

“When Jesus saw the lepers he said, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests’; and while they were on their way, they were made clean.”  
(Luke 17:14)

We continue in our journey, Sunday by Sunday, through the Gospel of Luke. Luke is the gospel of liberation. It gives us the picture of Jesus who comes “to bring good news to the poor, to set the prisoners free, to give recovery of sight to the blind, to declare the year of the Lord’s favour” (Luke 4:16f) – Jesus the liberator, who crosses boundaries, ministers to women, touches lepers, cares for the outcasts, the poor, the oppressed.

## Thanks

But first, our very sincere thanks to all who helped make yesterday’s St George’s Fair such fun, and such a success. To our co-ordinator, Marian Jayes and her wonderful team of stall-holders, to all who came to support and buy and enjoy themselves – thank you. Thanks also to everyone for the 160 envelopes; and to all who have returned pledge forms for 2014, and made commitments to support the mission and ministry of the church.

And thank you to those who have indicated interest in remembering the Cathedral in their wills. This is a new project and I do encourage all of us to consider leaving a bequest to the Cathedral. Please speak to one of the churchwardens, or to me, for further details.

Many continue to be wonderfully generous, and faithful, in giving. There is a real “attitude of gratitude” around. Thank you, all of you.

## Our readings

Most of us know of the world-wide web – signified by the letters WWW – and the amazing world of information that is out there, somewhere in the clouds, accessible online – all very familiar to many of us, especially the younger generation. No more digging into dusty books. Just type in WWW and the key word, and within seconds we have access to huge quantities of information, ideas, links, resources – a whole new world of learning and wisdom. We could say that the key letters for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the age in which we live, are WWW.

Last Sunday was Confirmation Sunday, when the bishop confirmed some 22 young people and adults in a very special service. The key letters at Confirmation are not WWW, but WWS – we receive the Holy Spirit for Worship, Witness and Service. Worship - we offer praise and adoration and thanksgiving and love, to glorify God with our lives. Witness – we witness in word and deed to the truth of the gospel and the love of God for all people. Service – we look beyond ourselves to the needs of others, and we do what we can to help and make a difference.

Our readings for this morning help us reflect more deeply on what it means to witness.

Our reading from the prophet Jeremiah follows on from last Sunday's Old Testament reading from Lamentations and the destruction of the temple. The people are in exile. They are hoping for a quick return, an intervention from God, a quick fix to their problems. Jeremiah knows differently. He writes to those in exile in Babylon, and says to them: "Settle down. Build houses. Plant gardens. Allow your children to marry. You are not moving from where you are. In time, yes, 70 years from now, God will bring the people back to the Promised Land. But right now, you must make the best of things. And then these key words:

"Seek the welfare of any city to which I have exiled you, and pray to the Lord for it; on its welfare your welfare will depend." (Jer 29:7)

Be salt and light. Be a blessing. Be witnesses. Be the presence of Christ where you are, even in the place of exile and loss and desolation.

A challenge (Michael Whisson's favourite word), a command – but also a promise implicit in this: that even in the place of exile, God had not deserted his people, he had not forgotten about them. There is a future. The current season may be a season of lamentation and destruction and loss. But – as an Old Testament sign of resurrection – there will be a season of renewal and life and growth, even in the place of exile and loss.

There are many people who are in Grahamstown and here at the Cathedral for a season. Our boarders. Our students at Rhodes and at COTT. Our pastoral team of clergy and lay workers. They join with those who are here for life, for whom Grahamstown is home. The call for us all: be a blessing. Be witnesses. Plant gardens. Build houses. Put down roots. Seek the welfare of the city. Invest in the lives of others. And we see that happening: the Eden Project. The Holiday Club. Harvest Festival. Our marimbas. Our Choir School. Our youth readers, carefully coached week by week. Our Confirmation classes. Our links with Good Shepherd School and with Nombulelo. Shining, radiant faces coming out of church after worship. Our immense diversity as a cathedral community, so enriching, such a gift. Be a blessing. Be witnesses.

In our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, 2 Timothy (2:8-15) St Paul reminds Timothy to “remember the theme of my gospel: Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, born of David's line.” (2:8). We are people of the resurrection; we are also people of the incarnation – the word made flesh, God born into our world. Be a blessing. Be witnesses. Be a sign of the resurrection. “Be bright in the corner where you are.”

And we see this also in the bigger picture, in the life of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa: in the wonderful work being done by parishes all over our country, as Anglicans support local public

schools, as Anglicans care for the environment, as Anglicans plant churches in unreached areas, train leaders, nurture our children and young people. Further afield, Anglicans are working to bring healing to war-torn countries, such as South Sudan. Be a blessing. Be witnesses.

Our Gospel reading tells us of Jesus who brings the word of God, brings healing to the lepers, the outcasts, the untouchables, those who have been rejected by society, thrown out by the religious community. Jesus leads us into the no-go areas, to touch issues, to speak of things that others would rather ignore or avoid. We are told to “keep out of politics” or “stick to preaching the word of God, and mind your own business” – as if the word of God has nothing to do with the suffering, as if God had nothing to offer the oppressed, the unclean, the outcasts. But we are called to be a blessing. To be witnesses.

## **Gospel mandate**

Dorothy Day said, “Christians are called to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” Oscar Romero, former Catholic Archbishop of El Salvador, martyred, murdered, by the regime in that country for his brave witness to the gospel, wrote:

“For the church, the many abuses of human life, liberty, and dignity are a heartfelt suffering. The church... believes that in each person is the Creator’s image and that everyone who tramples it offends God. As the holy defender of God’s rights and of his images, the church must cry out. It takes as spittle in its face, as lashes on its back, as the cross in its passion, all that human beings suffer, even though they be unbelievers. They suffer as God’s images... Whoever tortures a human being, whoever abuses a human being, whoever outrages a human being abuses God’s image, and the church takes as its own that cross, that martyrdom.”

The recent Provincial Synod of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa had as its theme “Education for a Vision – A Vision for Education.” The focus was on theological education, as well as the

immense work being done by Anglicans all over southern Africa, in support of good education in our schools. Synod has two main roles: it is the highest governance body of our church, and so makes the laws, the canons, that govern how we live and work – a bit like the Parliament of the church; and Synod also expresses the mind of the church, the mind of Christ as far as we can discern that, on matters of concern. Provincial Synod passes resolutions, and has a voice and the right to speak out, like any group of citizens in our country; but it also speaks because we believe we are called by God to do so. It is a gospel imperative. It is part of the good news we bring.

So when the church speaks its mind, as it did at this last Provincial Synod, on the crisis of education, and we are told to keep out of politics, or we are asked what our mandate is, our reply is that we speak because it is a gospel imperative. There is no political agenda.

And so Provincial Synod affirmed all that is being done by the church in the area of education; it also thanked and affirmed “the many wonderful, deeply dedicated teachers and education department officials for their work.” At the same time, Synod expressed grave concern with “the appalling conditions in which too many of our children are expected to learn and thrive: absentee teachers, badly maintained school buildings, little or no sanitation, school books not being delivered”; and spoke out against the “corruption and laziness” which, Synod said, “deprives our children of the education they deserve.”

Provincial Synod called on “Anglican teachers who are members of SADTU to either transform the trade union into a body that truly serves the cause of education, or resign from SADTU.” Synod has also called for SADTU “to refrain from destructive stay-aways”, and for parliament to “implement legislation that declares the teaching profession to be an essential service.”

Synod also made it clear to all education department officials that “inefficiency and corruption is unacceptable – to either do their job or resign.” Synod also gave support to firm action being taken “against

recalcitrant teaching or administrative officials”, and called on all School Governing Bodies “to take ownership of our schools and hold staff and pupils to account.” Finally, Synod urged Anglicans “to do all in their power to ensure that our schools are places of learning, life, safety and discovery.”<sup>1</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

Hard words for some, I know. But I believe it is right that we follow Jesus as he ministers to the lepers, as he ventures into the no-go areas, and that we do all we can to bring about change, transformation, freedom, new life. And this is family talk – because we have here together teachers, including SADTU members, parents, pupils, members of SGBs, department of education officials. How can we not talk about something that affects us all so deeply? We are bound together by our baptism; we share in the holy meal of the body and blood of Christ; we belong to one body, one family of the church; we carry one another’s pains and burdens. Let us address this together.

Be a blessing. Live a life of worship, witness and service. Be salt and light. “Seek the welfare of any city to which I have exiled you, and pray to the Lord for it; on its welfare your welfare will depend.” (Jer 29:7) Heal the lepers. Embrace the outcasts. Bring light into dark places. Set the prisoners free. Be witnesses. Be a blessing.

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<sup>1</sup> ACSA Provincial Synod 2013