

Sunday 17th August 2014 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		Theological Education Sunday
Isaiah 55:6-11	Ps 84	Colossians 1:24-29
		Luke 5:1-11
FOLLOW THE LORD		

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

“ ‘Do not be afraid,’ said Jesus to Simon; ‘from now on you will be catching people.’ As soon as they had brought the boats to land, they left everything and followed him.” (Luke 5:10b-11)

Theological Education Sunday

Today parishes and dioceses throughout the Anglican Church of Southern Africa have as our focus theological education. In particular we want to show our support for the College of the Transfiguration here in Grahamstown. The College of the Transfiguration is the only seminary in our country for the training of Anglican ordinands, and as such it plays a key role in the life of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa.

Our readings today have been specially chosen to reflect the theme of Theological Education Sunday, and remind us all of the purpose for which we are here, our journey together as disciples and followers of Christ.

Isaiah 55 – The word of the Lord fulfils its purpose. Seek the Lord; repent and return and be forgiven – find your direction in life. Be open to God’s calling. Be aware once again of the immensity of God “my ways and thoughts, God says, are not your ways.” Be open to the word of God, the spirit of God shaping us and bringing new birth and growth and possibilities, like water after a drought. The promise that even as we face the destruction and seeming hopelessness perhaps in

our own lives or on a national scale, that the word of the Lord fulfils its purpose. Let us hold that promise and that hope in our dark moments.

Colossians 1 – Paul, the great apostle, the teacher of the faith, who as the servant of the church knew what it meant to suffer for the sake of the Gospel. The goal of his teaching: “to present each of you as a mature member of Christ’s body. To this end I am toiling strenuously with all the energy and power of Christ at work in me.” (Col 1:28b-29). It is why we have theological education – for our students at the College of the Transfiguration; but it is also the purpose of theological education in our parish life, for each one of us, lay or ordained – that each one of us may become mature members of the body of Christ. That is why we have sermons, Bible study groups, prayer groups, Rooted in Jesus, confirmation classes, Sunday school, Lenten courses, retreats, quiet afternoons, Spiritfest lectures, training sessions – to help us grow into maturity as followers and disciples of Christ.

Luke 5 – Jesus teaches the crowds and calls the disciples. He moves among the people in their everyday lives – on the lake shore, amongst the fishermen, even in the shebeens, in the market place, in Pick and Pay or Checkers – and there he speaks and teaches and ministers and heals. He called those first disciples, and he calls us, to journey with him, to cast our nets into deep waters, into the dark places, the unfamiliar, to try new things, to do the unexpected, to push the boundaries. The deep waters.

Deep waters

Deep waters – we use this when we are getting into difficulties, when we are out of our depth, when we are floundering, when we are afraid. Deep waters are the unknown, they are dark, they are uncertain, we can drown. But deep waters can also represent the big picture, the invitation to step out, to learn to swim, to take a risk, to try something new.

I am grateful that at the beginning of this month, we as the Cathedral once again hosted the annual Breaking the Silence, the great and overwhelming gathering of some 1700 Rhodes students, and some of our schools as well, who have taken a public stand against rape and abuse. At the end of a long day of silence, many of them with mouths taped shut as a silent witness, they come here to the Cathedral, and take the tape off, and share, some of them, their devastating stories of rape and abuse. Painful as the evening is, it is for many of them an important step in their healing. Deep waters for them, and for us all.

Deep waters also for me last Friday when I was asked to lead prayers at the gathering on Rhodes campus to protest the killing of children in Gaza. Our prayers are with all places of conflict and division and hatred and loss and anguish – Gaza and Israel, Iraq, with thousands of Christians and other minority groups being driven from their homes, being forced to convert to Islam or face death; Nigeria, with the kidnapped school girls still in captivity, and ongoing suffering and death in that country.

We go into deep waters when we speak truth that upsets others or rocks the boat, or when we confront destructive or divisive behaviour, when we disturb the peace or explore new ways of doing things. What are your deep waters? In what way are you and I being invited to cast our nets into deep waters?

The College of the Transfiguration

Grahamstown is an interesting place. It is described as a sleepy hollow, the City of Saints, G-town; it is known for the National Arts Festival, its historic buildings, its early life as part of Frontier Country, a place of conflict, the meeting of cultures, donkeys and cows wandering down High Street; sadly it is also a place of poverty and unemployment, water and electricity outages, and potholes. But it is also known as a place of educational excellence – a number of outstanding schools, and a world-class university; and the College of the Transfiguration. Many of us are here because of our connection

with education in some form or another, and sometimes we might forget just how fortunate we are to be here, and to have this network of learning on our doorstep.

I had the privilege of attending what was then St Paul's College, and is now the College of the Transfiguration, in the mid-1980s. It was for me three years of intense formation and encounter – our daily worship and prayer; lectures and discussions, theology, biblical studies, ethics, doctrine, pastoral care; and our journey as a community of very diverse people from all over southern Africa. At that time all ordinands were male – the church was not ordaining women in those days – but in all other ways we reflected the racial and theological and political melting pot that was our country and our church. It was for me an intensely formative time, and I am immensely grateful for the privilege of those three years. They provided us as ordinands with an essential foundation for parish life and ministry.

I am sure that all of us who have had the privilege of tertiary education would acknowledge just how formative our years of study and interaction were for us. We see it happening here amongst us, year after year, as students come and go, arriving here in Grahamstown at Rhodes or Eastcape Midlands, many of them straight out of school, boys and girls, and three or four short years later leave as young men, young women, poised, degree in hand, with the world at their feet. We see our children and grandchildren enter university, wide-eyed, with so much to learn – and we see them grow and embrace knowledge and learning with energy and excitement – and go out into the world, off to work, with the tools for the job.

That is exactly what happens at the College of the Transfiguration. Part of its slogan or motto is “Transforming the church and the world for the love of Christ.” “To be formed, informed and transformed.” Students, ordinands, men and women, come here from all over southern Africa, for between one and three years. They attend lectures and seminars, write essays and assignments and exams. They read and study. But they do more than that. They live together in community,

they worship and pray together, they interact, they grow in understanding, they learn to handle conflict, they begin to embrace diversity and difference. And they are shaped and formed and moulded, given the tools for the job.

We as the Cathedral are blessed by a long and rich relationship with the College of the Transfiguration. Many of the Cathedral clergy over the years were trained there. Students from the College are placed here each year, and get to know us, and we them, and we are blessed by their presence amongst us. Staff from the College worship here, and minister here on occasion. A number of Cathedral members are on College Council; some of us lecture there as well.

I ask that we continue to support, embrace, encourage, protect and be proud of the College; that we pray for the College staff and students and their families; and that we celebrate the links we as the Cathedral have with the College. We congratulate Professor Barney Pitso, and the college staff, including our own Dr Andrew-John Bethke, on their leadership of the College over the last few years, its formal accreditation as a place of higher learning; and we congratulate the rector-elect, The Revd Dr Vicentia Kgabe, on her appointment, and look forward to her arrival here in January 2015.

At the heart of all theological education is **formation**¹ – to grow as mature members of the body of Christ (Col 1). There is **personal formation** – as we respond to God’s calling on our lives, like the disciples on the lakeshore; as we discern how God is calling us, in whatever aspect of life or ministry, lay or ordained. There is **spiritual formation** – as we deepen our response to God’s call, as we learn to pray, as we grow in our relationship with the Lord, as we stumble and fall and sin and are forgiven, as we get to understand our gifts and strengths, our weaknesses and our challenges. There is **academic formation** – as we do formal studies of scripture and Christian belief, so that our minds and our lives are formed into the mind of Christ.

¹ Based on “The Four Strands of Fuller’s DNA” in *Fuller – Theology, News & Notes*. Spring 2014, 9.

There is **global formation** – getting the big picture, the deep waters, moving away from the shore, from our familiar territory, seeing the other side of the story, coping with difference, embracing diversity, as we begin to see what it means to serve Christ in our diverse communities not only here in Grahamstown but all over this country and indeed throughout the world.

CONCLUSION

May the Lord bless the College of the Transfiguration, our students amongst us, all involved – and may God continue to shape us in our life and our journey together.