

<b>Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> August 2015</b> <b>St Augustine's, Grahamstown</b> <b>9.30 a.m.</b>		<b>Archdeaconry Family Day</b> <b>MARIKANA DAY (16.08.12)</b> <b>The Unity of the Church</b> <b>AAPB pg 325</b>
Ezekiel 37:15-28	Ps 122 or 133	Ephesians 4:1-6
		John 17:11-23
<b>AFRICA UNITE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD</b>		

Jesus prayed, “May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me.... may they be completely one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me.” (Jn 17:21b-23)

Greetings to our host rector, Canon Lawrence Nzwana, and Nosipho; all clergy present; and your spouses; churchwardens, members of parish council, lay ministers, guild presidents and executive members, all our guilds, students from the College of the Transfiguration; our mothers and fathers, young people, children, all the people of God – I greet you all in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

As the archdeaconry we extend our very sincere sympathies to Fr Mluleki Mize, on the passing of his dear wife Vuyiswa. Thank you to all in the archdeaconry, especially my clergy colleagues, and the people of St Philip's, for your love and support for Fr Mize during this sad time. We give thanks for mama Vuyiswa's life, for the person that she was, and for all that she meant to us; for her life of worship, witness and service. May she rest in peace and rise in glory.

Thank you for being here today, all of you, parishes of the archdeaconry, members of the archdeaconry family.

A special word of thanks and appreciation to the organising committee: Sub Dean Mzinzisi, Revd Gwen Mvula, Fr Milton Quntu, Fr Mluleki Mize. You have done a wonderful job! Thank you!

I acknowledge that the Cathedral is thin on the ground today. We cannot close the doors of the Cathedral, or cancel services there. The Sub Dean, Revd Claire, Revd Monwabisi, Revd Siphokazi, all send their apologies. Today the Cathedral is having a big farewell for Paul Daniels, our American volunteer, who has been with us for the past two years. But the Cathedral is with you in spirit, and the Cathedral gift for the diocesan family day has been deposited. We are on board!

Also, because of the farewell at the Cathedral, I must ask you to excuse me after my sermon this morning, so that I can join the farewell ceremonies. I requested Canon Lawrence to continue with the service on my behalf. Thank you, Canon Lawrence.

## **Africa unite for the glory of God**

The theme that the organising committee chose for our celebrations this weekend is “Africa unite for the glory of God.” Wow! What a theme! What a topic! Not just the archdeaconry, or Grahamstown, or SA, but Africa – united. It sounds like a football club – Africa United. But it is not a football club. It is a vision, a dream, a goal, a hope, a call – Africa united, for the glory of God.

So exciting – yet when we look around us, how hard it is. As much as we pray and long for unity, there is so much that divides us, so much that tears us apart as communities, as a nation, across the world. Every day brings its new sadness, its reminders of our deep divisions, of the terror that people live under, of the huge obstacles to unity.

We are in Women’s Month; August in our church is the Month of Compassion; ten days ago in Grahamstown we had the annual Silent Protest against sexual violence and rape; the statistics are that 1 out of every 3 women in SA will be a victim of sexual violence; many live in fear. Today is Marikana Day, the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the killings at Marikana – and labour disputes and conflict continue to be a major part of our country. This past Friday, August 14<sup>th</sup>, was the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II, in which over 60 million

people, most of them civilians, died, making it the biggest conflict in human history. April 18<sup>th</sup> 2015, 4 months ago, saw the killing of Emmanuel Sithole, part of the dreadful outbreak of xenophobic violence that swept through our country earlier this year.

Closer to home, just down the road in Port Elizabeth, the newspaper headlines of the *Herald* newspaper this past Friday said “Walmer township in flames” – people protesting about lack of police in their area to protect them. A bit further away, up in Gauteng, I have been watching with great sadness the unfolding events at a school (Roodepoort Primary School) where parents have objected to the appointment of the new principal – and in the end the premier has decided to close the school, at least for a while.

People all around are angry, raging; there is this simmering discontent and unhappiness just below the surface. Almost every night on TV brings another service delivery protest, stones thrown, tyres burning, cars set alight; one of our priests commented “people are so desperate to get the attention of the authorities, and they don’t know any other language except to toyi-toyi.”

Indeed, it is very difficult to talk of unity when we are so angry, when we are so unhappy, when we are so afraid, when we are so filled with despair.

And yet, in the face of all this division and fear and hatred and anger, the unity of the church, the unity of Christians, is one of the biggest gifts that we can give to the world; it is our most important witness; it is also the hardest thing we are called to do.

## **Our readings**

Let’s remind ourselves of some of the themes from our scripture readings.

**Ezekiel 37:15-28** – two sticks, two nations, become one stick – two divided nations, Judah and Israel, are bound together by God to become one. Divided by conflict, disagreement, hatred, political divisions, years of separation and hostility – yet it is God who will bring them together and make them one.

**Ps 122** – pray for the peace of Jerusalem – pray for the peace of the people of God

**Ps 133** – how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity

**Eph 4:1-6** – the little things which hold us together: “be humble, gentle, patient, show your love by being tolerant with one another...”

- and the foundations of our faith that bind us together: “one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all...”

**John 17:11-23** – the final prayer, in John’s Gospel, before Jesus was betrayed and crucified, and so a prayer that we hear as we would hear the last prayer and last wishes of someone we love dearly, as they are about to die.

The High Priestly Prayer ‘may they be one’. (esp vss 20-23) with the result: “that the world may know that you sent me” and “that the world may know that you love them as you love me” – that others may know that God the Father loves us.

### **What do these readings say to us today?**

The unity that we have is as a result of the prayer of Jesus (Jn); the work of God (Ezek); the gift of the Spirit (Eph).

The unity of the church is like the unity of a family. We build it through our love.

### **The unity of a family**

What does unity look like? This unity for which we long and pray?

What does unity not look like?

Does unity mean that we are all the same? That we all think the same? That we all look the same? That we always agree? Claire (Nozolile) and I are blessed with two gorgeous daughters. On the surface, they might look the same – both blond, both with two eyes, two ears, one mouth... but they are very very different! And as parents we love them both – although they are different. Don't all parents do the same?

What does unity mean? It means that we belong together, *no matter what*.

And when things go wrong - when children run off, like the story in the gospel about the two sons, the two brothers, when the younger son ran off and the older brother stayed behind at home – when the younger son returned home, the father welcomed him back – because he is part of the family. We always belong, even when we disagree, when we hurt one another...

What does a family do? How does a family live together? We welcome and embrace one another. We forgive one another. We are honest with one another. We support one another. We might not always get one with one another – but we always belong; and when the younger son returns, he doesn't need a new birth certificate, because he is a son of the house.

And we are bound together: by the blood of Jesus; by the water of baptism; by the food of the Eucharist.

As a parish, as the archdeaconry, as the diocese, as Anglican Christians, as part of the wider body of Christ – we belong together.

We celebrate our life together as the archdeaconry. We celebrate our life together as the diocese.

We support one another when we are in need: when there is grief and loss; when there are financial needs; when there is pain and sorrow

Unity – it doesn't mean to close our eyes, to ignore the problems, to hope it will all go away; it means to speak, to act, to get involved, to work, to struggle, to strive, to weep, to grieve, to resist, to stand up – with this vision of what we can be, always in front of us, with this hope to which God has called us... always in our hearts... this new world, this new life, this new community, this new country.

I often hear of how divided Grahamstown is. But the most diverse group of people I meet with on a regular basis, is the archdeaconry – our parishes. I meet people from every sector of our community here in this gathering, in this family, that I would not meet anywhere else. What a remarkable family we are. The people of God.

## **CONCLUSION**

Jesus' final words and last prayer – that we may be one. When we quarrel or disagree, our disunity is our biggest failure. When we stand together and love one another, our unity is our greatest success.

Let's do all we can as Christians, as the people of God, to hold together in our diversity, that we may be one... that SA and Africa may be united to the glory of God.