

<b>Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016</b> <b>Cathedral, Grahamstown</b> <b>3 p.m.</b>		<b>COLLEGE OF THE TRANSFIGURATION</b> <b>GRADUATION</b> <b>Tuesday in Lent</b>	
	Ps 78:39-70	Jeremiah 17:19-27	
		Mark 8:1-10	
<b>OUR LIFE AND WITNESS</b>			

“He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; he brought him from following the ewes to be the shepherd of his people Jacob and of Israel his own possession. So he tended them with upright heart and guided them with skilful hand.” (Ps 78:68-70)

### **Greetings, introduction**

Greetings to the Bishop of Grahamstown and Deputy Chair of Council, Bishop Ebenezer Ntlali; our College Rector, Revd Canon Dr Vicentia Kgabe; Bishops of our Province with us here today; members of College Council; College staff and students, your families; honoured guests; special greetings to those graduating today, many of you recently ordained, your families; all the people of God gathered here this afternoon – I greet you all in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is wonderful that we can be here, together. Thank you to Dr Kgabe for the invitation to preach. Claire and I enjoy, immensely, our interaction with the College, teaching some classes, having students here at the Cathedral on parish placement, the friendships, the great gift that you as the College are to Grahamstown and to the diocese. We are immensely proud of you all, of what you are achieving, and we thank you, Dr Kgabe, and your staff, for all that you are doing.

### **Readings and our journey of faith**

What do our scriptures say to us today? The psalm is an extended reflection of the experience of the people of God – part of their journey through the wilderness, when they in turn rebelled against God, and then forgot how God had delivered them; they experienced

God's judgement and God's restoration. And the psalm ends with the verses I chose for my text:

“He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; he brought him from following the ewes to be the shepherd of his people Jacob and of Israel his own possession. So he tended them with upright heart and guided them with skilful hand.” (Ps 78:68-70)

Because you, our students, our graduands, our recent ordinands, you are our young Davids, chosen by God, taken from your parish communities, brought here for a season, and then sent out into the church and into the world to be the shepherds of God's people. You are the ones tasked by the church to help us keep “our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” (Heb 12:1)

You are the ones ordained by the church, set apart, to ensure that we remember what God has done, his work of salvation and deliverance, the good news. You have been set apart by the church, trained, formed, transformed – to keep us all faithful. You have made promises before God and the community that you will be faithful; that you will keep on praying; that you will nurture and care for the flock of God.

Today, gathered here, is a gentle way of asking – how is it going? How are you doing? And of course you have returned to make sure, as former students, that the College is still standing, that the new intake of students is behaving themselves, and that the College is still on track!

The reading from Jeremiah – the call to keep the Sabbath holy – is a reminder not only of the Ten Commandments, but that we are free people, not slaves – because free people are allowed to rest once a week; a reminder that the Christian faith and the good news includes protecting the weak, guarding against exploitation; a reminder to preserve the well-being of everyone, the good of the community; and it is a reminder of the importance of rhythm and balance: the

Benedictine rhythm of rest, pray, work. Have you found that life-giving rhythm, in your new parish communities?

The gospel reading (Mark 8:1-10), the feeding of the 4000 with bread and fish has a number of themes. It is the second such occurrence in Mark's gospel. God feeds his people with manna in the desert, and so it is a sign of the presence of God amongst us. The four-fold Eucharistic action as Jesus takes, blesses, breaks and gives thanks; Jesus as the bread of life (Jn 6); his practical care and compassion for the hungry; "man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Deut); food being provided in the midst of drought and hardship.

It is a picture of the ministry and witness of the church: the encounter with Christ that we have in the Eucharist; our care and compassion for those in need; the worship of the church as a sign of Christ. Are you feeding the flock of God?

## **Our witness**

The College academic year ended, last year, and the new year began, in the midst of the #feesmustfall student protests, that began at Wits and spread rapidly all over the country. We were wondering at what point we would have College students joining the protests and demanding that College #feesmustfall – but perhaps it would have been a protest of the Bishops, as dioceses are faced with the fee increases. Instead, the College community, led by Dr Kgabe, joined protesting Rhodes students as an act of solidarity, and later took part in a candle-light prayer service on campus. With many others, we say that no-one should be excluded from getting a quality education for financial reasons.

We are in a fragile time as a country. What is our witness? What is the role and the place of the church, you and me, at a time like this? Certainly we continue to pray: to hold all our universities in prayer during these volatile times. So much is at stake. There is in some quarters a growing movement which says "everything must fall" – all

structures that are thought to be in any way oppressive, must be brought down. It has its merits, but also its clear dangers of violence, destruction, and extremist attitudes and behaviour. Nothing is achieved by burning buildings, attacking one another, vilifying one another.

In the midst of all the heat, let's not forget the two Great Commandments: to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, minds and strengths; and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

## **Reconciliation**

To love is to reconcile – to be people of reconciliation – to make friends where we were enemies - not an easy or popular idea in some circles today. To speak of reconciliation is seen by some as a cop-out; a way of avoiding real issues; simply painting over the cracks and not addressing the realities of structural injustice, oppression, racism. There have even been recent calls by some to “keep religion off the campuses” and to avoid the prayer meetings that are being held at some universities – as these are seen as merely a way of shutting our eyes to the real issues.

However, our reconciliation with one another is based on the reconciliation that Christ gives us: “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message [ministry] of reconciliation.” (2 Cor 5:19) It means taking one another's burdens, just as Christ did: sharing the pain, entering into the sufferings of others, reaching out hands of healing – not to cover up or avoid issues, but to walk with one another and find the solution together.

The call today is to continue to pray; continue to reach out; to reclaim the role of reconcilers in our communities, in our church, in our country: to be peacemakers. It may well be the way of the cross.

## CONCLUSION

Richard Rohr puts it like this: “God isn’t looking for servants [or] slaves... God simply wants mirroring images of God to live on this earth and to make the divine visible. That is, of course, the way love works. It always overflows, reproduces and multiplies itself.”<sup>1</sup>

May God bless us in our life and witness.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Shape of the Universe is Love.* <https://cac.org/the-shape-of-the-universe-is-love-2016-02-29>