



## **THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**

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to the Second Session of the Fifty-second Synod  
of the Diocese of Nelson**

**This address is in two parts.  
Part 1, the synod sermon,  
Given at the Church of the Nativity, Blenheim on  
Thursday the 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2003 and  
Part 2 in Nativity Parish Hall on  
Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 2003.**

## **THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS (Part 1)**

### **THE SYNOD SERMON**

(Thursday – 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2003)  
The Church of the Nativity, Blenheim

## **Building Remarkable Churches**

### Prayer

Living God,

We thank you that you have given us minds with which to think

The Holy Scriptures out of which to do our thinking

The Holy Spirit to be our Teacher

And the Christian Community as a fellowship within which to reflect.

Grant that we may think together over our Synod – in submission to your Word, in dependence on your Holy Spirit – doing it together for the glory of Jesus Name,

Amen.

### **GREETINGS AND INTRODUCTION**

I'd like to welcome you to Blenheim, to our new look synod and especially to our synod service.

Our theme over these two days together is “Building Remarkable Churches”. The reasons for this choice of theme will, I trust, become obvious as we proceed.

There is much in Scripture to encourage us to be what God has called us to be – remarkable churches. A cursory look at the New Testament and especially the Letters, shows us a number of significant things.

### **Leadership Today**

We can discern that remarkable churches are usually led by remarkable leaders. I am not necessarily talking about popular leadership that might attract a cult following. The New Testament discourages that sort of thing as can be noted in the opening chapter of 1 Corinthians.

When it comes to leadership, the Scriptures seem to point us in another direction, – to things often overlooked in our drive for success. These things must be noted by those who aspire to lead or who are sometimes thrust into positions of leadership unwittingly.

My premise this afternoon is, that if we are to have remarkable churches, we must have remarkable leaders, and about this Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, has much to say. He points us in another direction from that which might be termed successful from the world's perspective.

What then are the distinguishing marks of a remarkable leader and by that I mean a good and godly leader?

If you are attending this synod – you are a leader of some sort. Either you're a pastor with responsibility for a parish, or some ministries within your parish. Maybe you have been elected as a synod rep – like it or not – others have recognised certain abilities within you and have asked you to be their representative.

Among us there are also leaders in Sunday School, Home-Groups, A.A.W. and other ministries that take you out of the church plant and into your communities. Many of you are parents – that too involves leadership. You are leaders!

Looking at the church today it could be said that its leadership is struggling. Flaws in church leadership have never been more apparent. We have seen leaders fall from grace or hit the headlines for many reasons – moral failure, bad judgement and unorthodox belief. This has brought embarrassment and shame to the Body of Christ. I wonder sometimes if the Church's voice is being ignored in many sectors of society because its leadership appears to be lacking integrity and sometimes even honesty. There are, however, Apostolic instructions to help us if we will listen.

### **Younger Leaders**

Perhaps you have noticed that increasingly in the secular world – and this is also true in the Church – leadership is getting younger. We are beginning, to see a growing number of young adults committing themselves, not only to Christ, but also to leadership in the Church. The pendulum is beginning to swing in a right and healthy direction and I believe that this trend will continue. (14 years ago we had the oldest average aged clergy of any diocese – now, I am told we perhaps have the youngest). It's thrilling to see younger leadership coming through and it's very important for the life of the Church.

That, in a sense, is the background to our reading from 1 Timothy. Timothy was a young leader. He had been given an awesome responsibility – perhaps beyond his qualifications and experience. He needed guidance and wise counsel.

What then are these Apostolic instructions for leaders, especially if they are to be remarkable leaders? There is much here for us all.

### **APOSTOLIC INSTRUCTIONS FOR REMARKABLE LEADERS**

To our reading from 1 Timothy. The apostle Paul says in verse 11 of chapter 4, "Command and teach these things".

Now it may not strike you as being important but those two words, “these things” – which represent a single word in the Greek text – are extremely significant. It appears about a dozen times in the Pastoral Letters and it refers to Paul’s apostolic instructions for the Church.

There on the one hand stands the Apostle, with all the authority that he has been given as an apostle of Jesus Christ – an authority to teach in the name of Christ – and on the other, the local church whose life and health depends on implementing these instructions.

Paul is instructing the church and in between these two – the Apostle and the Church – stands Timothy, whose responsibility was to receive instructions and pass them on to the local church.

This is almost precisely the situation in which we find ourselves at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. There are no living Apostles today with any authority comparable to say to Paul, Peter or John.

So what do we have instead of living Apostles? We have the New Testament. And the New Testament is precisely the teaching of the Apostles as it has come down to us in its definitive form.

Today, the responsibility of the authorized leaders – the teachers and the pastors of the Church – is to receive the instruction from the Apostles in the New Testament and pass it on to the Church. (This is made clear in our ordination services). We stand in a very real sense between the Apostles and the Church in a similar way as did Timothy and other second-generation leaders in the New Testament church. .

Now its clear from the Pastoral Letters and elsewhere that our responsibility as leaders is to preserve and even defend this teaching. Timothy was to pass it on, to expound it, to apply it and even fight for it, for the benefit and the health of the local church.

It’s an awesome responsibility and a wonderful privilege, and remarkable leaders will do this, for the benefit of the Church – Christ’s Body.

## **CHECK LIST FOR LEADERS**

The Apostle now launches into a checklist for remarkable leadership. In these days when godliness and clear biblical or orthodox teaching is being openly challenged, and in some parts of the Church even flouted or rejected – we need to stop and check our own foundations and allow the Word of God and Spirit of God to challenge our commitment to Christ and his Church, and to a world in desperate need.

### **1 Watch your Example**

Firstly then, says the Apostle, “Watch your example (v 12) don’t let anyone look down on you but set an example.” That’s good advice. That’s wise counsel.

If Timothy wants to have people accept his leadership, to listen to him, he must set them a good example. They won't despise his youth or inexperience or whatever, if they can admire his life and character. The world has been greatly let down by the behaviour of the leadership of the Church in recent days. Our message must be backed by a consistent life-style.

The Apostle Peter said the same thing when he was writing to leaders in the Church. "Be shepherds of the flock of God", he said, "Not domineering over the people – but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5).

The great temptation, whenever one's leadership is questioned or challenged, whether young or old, is to feel hurt or offended and therefore we try to assert it more strongly and become autocratic – have you noticed?

It is said of some clergy that they believe not in the priesthood of all believers, but in the papacy of all pastors. That's the way we can act sometimes. We become very autocratic and controlling.

That's not the way to get our leadership accepted. No! Paul is saying the way is to "set an example". We are to be servant leaders. Leadership and lordship are two totally different things.

The days of prince bishops and autocratic clergy or leaders are gone – they should never have been. Christian leaders lead by example – not by coercion or threat. We are to be role models, which invite a following. Not bosses which compel or bully.

And notice – before we leave this first instruction – that our example is to be comprehensive. It's to be both in our speech and in our behaviour – in how we talk and how we live.

It's to be in the three qualities of faith, love, and purity (v.12). Faith that is directed to God, love that is directed to other people and purity that is directed to self – all three – not just love for people – but purity and faith. That's the challenge to each of us.

How do I measure up this afternoon? "Set an example" – "watch your example," says the Apostle. Are we 'walking the talk?' Is our lifestyle commensurate with our speech – our teaching?

## **2. Identify your Authority**

Secondly, identify your authority. (v.13) I want to spend a little time on this because there is confusion for many in the Church over where the authority should lie.

The present Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams informs us that the spiritual unity of the Anglican Communion is barely holding at this juncture. We are all aware of the issues, having seen, heard and read the media reports.

Rank and file Anglicans faithfully worshipping in our parishes Sunday by Sunday worry about the ultimate direction of this Communion. ‘Will we survive’? – is a question being asked by many. Personally, I am hopeful – mostly!

But regardless of where the current debates will take us we need to understand that this is not a crisis over human sexuality. The crisis of our Church is a crisis of biblical and Anglican orthodoxy versus something else. In other words – where does the ultimate authority for the Church lie? Under whose authority will we live? Who will call the shots? – God, the living God – or us, his creation. I will say more about this in a moment.

Back to the text. (v.13) “Until I come,” Paul says, “Give attention to the public reading of Scripture” – reading it aloud in public.

The Greek word here for “reading” is used of the public reading of a will, a petition, or edict – the public reading of some document. In the New Testament it’s used of the public reading of Scripture. Among other places it’s used twice in the Book of Acts of the reading of the Old Testament in the synagogue.

It’s also fascinating to note that in addition to reading the Old Testament, the Apostles gave directions for their letters to be read in the public Christian assembly – in Church!

Do you know these verses? Thessalonians 5:27 – “I charge you”, says Paul, “before the Lord, that this letter be read to all the brothers and sisters publicly”. Or again in Colossians 4:16 “When this letter has been read among you brothers and sisters, see that it is read in the Church of the Laodicians.”

The point that I am making is that the Apostles expected their letters to circulate around the churches and to be read in the public assembly when people came together to worship. Now that is an extraordinary instruction, don’t you think? Quite clearly the Apostles put their writings on a level with the Old Testament Scriptures.

In the very early Christian assembly there were two public readings of Scripture. The first from the Old Testament – the Law or the Prophets – and then from either the memoirs or the letters of the Apostles of which each local church had begun to make its own collection.

And some think that it’s an Anglican aberration to have two or three readings – something we invented and in some places easily disposed of when we don’t have enough time. No! It was the practice of the early Church – that’s where it came from. It’s biblical and it’s historical and this practice continues today as we have an Old Testament and a New Testament Lesson in public worship.

Now there is something more than this – Timothy, the leader, was to attend not only to the public reading of Scripture – but notice also to preaching and teaching – literally to exhortation and instruction.

It was already the custom in the Synagogue for the Scripture reading to be followed by a Scripture exhortation and this practice was carried over into the Christian Church. But notice – the reading comes first.

First we read the authoritative Word of God and then we seek to explain it – to expound it – to open it up – to apply it and so on. The reading, then the exhortation and the instruction out of it.

All Christian leaders, teachers, preachers, home-group leaders, Sunday School teachers, etc. have the same subordinate position occupied by Timothy. We must be conscientious in our interpretation and application of Scripture so that our teaching is not rejected, but is accepted because it is seen to be taken from the Word of God and not some hobbyhorse, or the latest of the ever changing fads of society today.

This is so important. Any person, called to lead and to teach must have Scripture before them as they teach and be very careful in their interpretation so that people will not reject what is taught as a misinterpretation, but will accept it because they see that this is what the authoritative Scripture says.

Some might reject it because they disagree with it or, because it doesn't fit their worldview or, because it's just too hard, as we are seeing in society and parts of the Church today, but they are in no doubt that this is what Scripture says.

### **The Supreme Authority**

Let me say quite clearly that we (Anglicans) are a Church that accepts the supreme authority of Scripture. This has been the traditional position of all Christian Churches (including ours) right throughout history and we hold it still. Only in very recent days has this been questioned.

Above the traditions of the Church and the opinions of individuals – Scripture has full, supreme and final authority according to our Anglican formularies. So we dissent immediately from any who maintain that Christians are under no obligation to accept, let alone follow the clear teaching of Scripture.

Our authority is in the whole of Scripture – it has, we believe an inner consistency. The worst blunder we can ever commit in biblical interpretation is to isolate a passage from its immediate context and from the total context of the Bible, be it over, for example, matters of human sexuality, the complementarity of the sexes, or the sanctity of human life at both ends, the unborn or the terminally ill, or the suitability of those called to serve as leaders in the Church – all of which are issues we are facing today both inside and outside the Church.

It's interesting that the human sexuality debate seems to be moving away from the Scriptures and the tenor of Scripture to a criticism that we cannot trust Scripture or its authors in this modern day on such a matter. Scripture, we are told, is just one among many authorities – surely the enlightened mind is the supreme authority now!

But no, said the Lambeth Conference of Bishops in 1998. They resoundingly affirmed the supreme authority of Scripture in the Church. There are of course other lesser authorities, like tradition, but the supreme authority is Scripture – and it's a very

Anglican thing to say so and believe so! – though sadly it does seem that we may have a fight on our hands here.

I find it interesting that for renewal of the Church, Roman Catholics and the great Orthodox Churches of Eastern Europe and the Middle East are increasingly looking to Scripture, while the liberal sections of the Western Church (including our own) are looking to society and the culture of our day.

In the West we are in danger of rejecting the Church of the two-thirds world. We say we value unity highly and yet today we deliberately seem to keep doing things that alienate the majority of Anglicans – let alone Christians.

This bishop, along with others, will stand with our African, Asian and South American sisters and brothers as they seek to call an ailing church in the West back to biblical orthodoxy in belief and behaviour in line with its historic tradition.

### **“Fight the Good Fight of the Faith”**

In chapter 6:12 the Apostle writes, ‘Fight the good fight of the faith’ and it’s very important that we do. .

In that same chapter you’ll notice that there were certain false teachers who were wandering away from “The Faith”. Unfortunately it’s always there in churches whatever branch. Sometimes it’s a hyper fundamentalist thing and sometimes it’s a liberal thing – going after easy options – bowing to society’s values and standards. Paul exhorts Timothy to hold to ‘The Faith’. The Apostle assumes that there is such a thing as a body of revealed doctrine, a sacred deposit of Truth that has been entrusted to the Church and that we have to protect and defend as well as proclaim. Remarkable Christian leaders will take up this task.

To be a remarkable leader – a good minister of Christ in the New Testament sense – will mean more than establishing so called successful parishes, more than a successful looking diocese and more than numbers. It will also mean that we will protect and defend the Faith. Some of us may have forgotten that.

Of course we do not believe in pluralism but so often we act like pluralists – you have your truth and I have mine. Tolerance often seems more important than truth. However we are also called to be defenders and protectors of the Faith. It means that remarkable leaders will need to study the Scriptures – be steeped in the Word. To do so will help us build remarkable and faithful churches, not just large, successful ones.

At my ordination as Bishop I had to make promises. Those of us ordained had to make vows, which I trust we take seriously.

*‘Bishops are to exercise godly leadership, to maintain wise discipline within its fellowship (the Church). They are to encourage the Church in its obedience to God’s Word and they are to keep the Church true to its Faith as found in Scripture and the Creeds – to teach this Faith and proclaim it’.* There’s the challenge for any Bishop – any leader. Proclamation of the Faith and defending or protecting it is our ministry together. We are to “fight the good fight of the Faith”, says the Apostle, and uncomfortable though it may be for us, it’s a fight that we are called to.

Nobody enjoys a fight. Fighting is an unpleasant business – it’s always undignified. We see it in the current sexuality debate. Fighting the good fight of the Christian Faith should be distasteful. There is something sick and sad about us if we enjoy theological controversy, especially over key biblical issues that are clear.

Unfortunately it is a fight in which we have to engage. It can’t be avoided, because this revealed truth of God is so sacred and so precious. We’re not talking about conjecture here, but revealed Truth. It concerns the glory of God and the good of the Church. Don’t we feel it in our hearts when some leader leads people astray? So when truth is in peril by false teaching, then it is a painful necessity to engage in the fight – it’s not an option.

However, in fighting the false, even the deadly, we must exhibit the gentleness of Christ. We must not use the means that have been used recently in North America against those who have been forced from their parishes over their stand against same sex blessings or gay ordination issues.

I’ve spent a disproportionate amount of time on this section, ‘Identifying our Authority’. But this is the major issue in the Church today – not human sexuality or the sanctity of life or the role of marriage in society etc. If we get the authority issue wrong – all else can go wrong.

As leaders let’s hold fast to the supreme authority of Scripture for the Church and resolve to be faithful, to develop disciplined habits of study, both of Scripture and of the world of today in order to relate the one to the other – never knowingly twisting, distorting, manipulating or disobeying the Word of God but determining to be faithful to what God has revealed in his Word.

Dr Donald Coggan, a former Archbishop of Canterbury says this of the Christian leader.

*“The Christian preacher (leader) has a boundary set for him. He is not an entirely free man. There is a very real sense in which it may be said of him ‘that the Almighty has set bounds that he shall not pass. He’s not at liberty to invent or choose his message. On the contrary it has been committed to him and it is for him to declare, expound, and commend to his hearers’”.*

And he adds, *“It is a great thing to come under the magnificent tyranny of the Gospel”.*

Paul says to Timothy, ‘identify your authority’.

### **3. Exercise your Gift.**

The third instruction for remarkable leaders – exercise your gift. (v.14)

“Do not neglect your gift which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.” The reference is to what we could call

Timothy's ordination when the hands of the presbyters or elders were laid upon him. At the same time some word of prophecy was spoken, either to or about Timothy.

We don't know what that gift was for the simple reason that we're not told. It may have been the authority and skill that he would need to be a minister of the Word of God. It may be the gift of discernment so that he could distinguish between true and false teaching. Whatever that gift was, he must not neglect it. He must not leave it idle, he must cultivate it and exercise it and as Paul says in his second letter to Timothy, he must fan it into flame.

This is important for all leaders and especially young leaders. All of us have the responsibility of discerning what gifts we've been given. We are also to help others discern theirs for the building up of the Church and the glory of Jesus Christ – not for attention seeking or our own glory.

If we do that, people will be receptive to our ministry because they'll see that God has called us, commissioned us and gifted us – and we're using his gifts in His service.

Do we know our giftings? Are we using them? Remember these gifts may be expressed through the individual but they are the property of the Body of Christ, the Church. If we hide our gifts or refuse to use them, we are robbing God and His Church!

Exercise your gifts.

#### **4. Show your Progress.**

Fourthly, show your progress (v.15)

“Put these things into practice”. “Be diligent in these things – give yourself wholly to them, so that everybody may see your progress”. That's very sound advice.

In all three spheres the Apostle has been talking about here in his correspondence with Timothy – his example, his teaching, his gifting – it's not only his diligence, his earnestness, his enthusiasm and his dedication, which need to be seen – but also his progress, his growth. Am I growing or am I stagnating as a Christian – as a Christian leader?

This means that the example set by leaders should be a dynamic and a progressive thing rather than merely just a static example. The question is – Are we still growing? Are we still as in love with Jesus as we used to be?

Sometimes Christian leaders feel they must give the impression to their congregations that they are perfect. They must never ever acknowledge that they can be wrong, or have any faults, or make mistakes or have personal battles. That's terribly foolish.

For at least two reasons: Its hypocritical – to pretend we are perfect when we know very well that we're not. And for another it's very discouraging because we give the impression that we're exceptional – almost inhuman – perfect – untouchable – which again, we're not!

Even the Apostle could say, “Not as though I have already attained – become perfect – but I press on towards the goal ...” In other words, as leaders, we too are pilgrims – we’re on a journey – we’ve not yet arrived – but we’re making progress towards the goal that has been set.

What we are called upon to be is honest. We have some doubts about ourselves, we have struggles, we’re on this journey. We have failures like everybody else but we are making progress. That’s the point. We are growing in grace. That’s what needs to be plain in Christian leaders.

Show your progress!

## **5. Mind your Consistency.**

Fifthly, mind your consistency. (v.16) “Pay close attention to yourself and your teaching”. Watch your life – literally yourself. And your doctrine – your teaching – persevere in them.

Timothy was to watch himself and his teaching of others. He was neither to be so engrossed in his ministry to others that he neglected himself. Nor was he to be so occupied in the culture of his own spiritual life that he neglected his ministry to others. Instead he was to be consistent - balanced. He was to practice what he preached. There was to be no dichotomy between what he was and what he was teaching.

Of these two inconsistencies – the first is more common. There are many of us as leaders who are so busy in church work that we have little time for the Lord himself! We’re so concerned for the welfare of others and keeping the wheels going round that we fail to discipline ourselves. But Christian leaders must keep the balance. Not neglecting either the nurture of our own spiritual lives or the ministry to others. This business of the Church can be all consuming. We need to be on guard. “Pay close attention to yourself,” says the Apostle.

Mind your consistency!

## **6. Adjust your Relationships.**

Finally, adjust your relationships. (5:1-2)

Although Timothy was relatively young, he found himself responsible for a mixed congregation, in gender and in age – not too unlike most of our congregations today.

Paul tells him that the gender and age of the people must determine how he treats them. This is important for Kiwis. Our culture is very pragmatist and very egalitarian. What works must be OK and we are all the same.

Let's take the older people first and there are many in our parishes. . We are often impatient with our elders – they're traditionalists we say – they won't budge or at least some of them won't. Try shifting the lectern an inch and you'll cop it! Furniture, it seems, often assumes a greater importance than belief or behaviour.

It may be that Timothy had to admonish somebody considerably older than himself. That's probably the context here. If that's so, his admonition must take the form of a gentle exhortation rather than a harsh rebuke. "Do not rebuke an older person harshly," says Paul. "Exhort him gently, as if he is your father". "Appeal to him respectfully" (another translation puts it). Relationships are important. Christianity is a relational Faith.

It's clear from the Apostle's teaching that older people are to be treated with the respect that is due to their age – but not only that, but also with the affection that is due to a parent. So he must treat the older men like fathers and the older women like mothers.

I believe this gives biblical warranty for recognising the generation gap in any congregation. In the Middle East or in many parts of the two thirds world today the younger generation of leaders would never dream of treating the older members the way we often do in the West. Which is more biblical?

Do I love those who disagree with me? Do I have as much care and concern for the older members whose view may be slightly different from mine? Or do I grumble and call them "Stick in the muds"?

We as leaders are called to pastor the whole flock of God according to Peter – not only those who agree with us. For all of us we must relate to other Christians – however different our tastes and styles etc

Then take Timothy's own generation – his peers. He is to treat younger men like brothers – loving them and not talking down to them condescendingly. He is to treat younger women like sisters, loving them too with absolute purity.

So, in a word, the local Church is rightly called the Church Family. This is a phrase that a number of our parishes have incorporated into their mission statement, or parish vision. The idea that the local church is family is absolutely right, but we need to see that it is true.

In the family there are fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, grandparents and little children, singles and marrieds. Leaders should not be insensitive to this and treat everybody alike – that could lead to inappropriate behaviour.

We should adjust our relationships, behaving towards our elders with respect, our own generation with equality, the opposite sex with restraint and purity, and all ages of both genders, with that affection which binds the members of the same family together.

How do we measure up?

Adjust your relationships!

## **CONCLUSION**

Let me draw this to a close. Remarkable churches have remarkable leaders and we have been looking at the apostle Paul's checklist for such leaders. There is much practical wisdom here – it's plain and it's clear.

Apostolic instructions for leaders – they're quite different from the world's wisdom but absolutely necessary for those called to leadership in the Church – for each one of us gathered in this Synod.

Building remarkable Churches – remarkable churches have remarkable leaders.

Could we remember these six things? Could they become knowingly, recognizably and consciously part of our leadership style? That is what the Apostle is encouraging here.

1. Watch your example – be a role model for others.
2. Identify your authority – be submissive to Scripture drawing your teaching from it. Defend the Faith.
3. Exercise your gift – supplying evidence of God's call on your life and his equipping.
4. Show your progress – that you've not stagnated but are growing in grace.
5. Mind your consistency – practice what you preach.
6. Adjust your relationships – be sensitive to people's age and gender.

Tomorrow we shall be considering together the premise that remarkable churches not only have remarkable leaders, but these remarkable churches are involved in remarkable things. We shall hear from some who are taking the Good News beyond the walls of our buildings out into the communities where they are located.

