



THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

**Delivered by the Right Reverend Derek L Eaton
QSM, MA, Dip Theol,
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 2nd October, 2003 and
Part 2 in Nativity Parish Hall on
Friday 3rd October, 2003.**

THE PRESIDENT’S ADDRESS (Part II)

(Friday – 3rd October 2003)
Nativity Parish Hall, Blenheim

BUILDING REMARKABLE CHURCHES

WELCOME

A te whanau a te Karaiti
Naumai, haere mai
Haere mai!

“Building Remarkable Churches” is the theme of this year’s synod. Yesterday in our Synod Service, (Part 1 of the President’s Address) we considered together that remarkable churches are led by remarkable leaders. We looked at the Apostolic instructions of Paul to Timothy, where he is outlining some characteristics of Christian leadership.

This morning I’ve invited several people to share with synod some remarkable ministries which breach the walls of the local church and flow out into the community.

Before we hear from them we need to identify what a remarkable church is, and to do this we must ask the question – What is the purpose of the local Church?

A “Fortress Mentality”

For years we had what some have called a “fortress mentality”. When it came to the Church we built “fortress” churches and dioceses – that is, we built churches aiming at holding on to what we had, or what we thought we had! It’s what became known in the 90s as a “maintenance” orientation. We focussed on land and buildings - on shifting the furniture around from time to time believing that was the panacea to all our ills.

This “fortress” mentality concentrated on budgets and programmes and what went on within the walls of its buildings. It shouted to the community, “Come to us – we have the answers”, when the Lord of the Church has always said, “Go” – “Go to them” – “Go out with the Good News”!

The “fortress” church is nearly always dominated by its internal programmes – looking after itself – feeding its own needs and preferences – it’s own desires – putting itself first without ever seeming to ask, “what does God want?” Sadly we have come to accept such church life as normal. However, by biblical standards it’s not normal! It’s abnormal.

Heretical Structures

Some churches and parishes have what I would call heretical structures – the doctrines, the beliefs might be orthodox and correct – but the structures are heretical. Why do I say that? – Because their structures actually deny the Gospel that they say they proclaim.

For a church not to be heretically structured, it must determine its ministry, its programmes and strategies, its very life – not by its own self-centredness or preferences, but by the service to which it is called by God in the world. In other words the Church must turn itself outwards towards the community. Towards a world in desperate need – even if it doesn't realise its need.

Jesus made it very clear that we are to be “salt” and “light” in our communities and in the world in which we live. So it seems to me that the presence of Christians, and Christians together – the Church – in any community – ought to make a difference!

Things are happening

However, let me encourage you by saying that things are happening. Do you realize that the Church is growing faster than it ever has in its 2000-year history? Despite what some might be saying, it's not all doom and gloom. Many of our people don't know that fact. Things admittedly can look grim in the West but that's not the full story.

Some of you have heard me give these statistics before, but just talking about our part of the Church – the Anglican part.

- There are nearly 8000 new adult believers each day converted to Jesus Christ.
- There are around 400 new Anglican congregations being planted every week somewhere around the world?
- In Nigeria alone there are more Anglicans in Church on a Sunday morning than all the U.K., North America and Australasia put together. It makes one think!
- In Asia, Africa and South America our Churches have been growing rapidly. There are reports of confirmation services of 4-5000 candidates.

So what about the Church? What about our call to mission? Where do we stand as followers of Jesus Christ this morning? What sort of Church are we going to be?

To be a 'remarkable' church is to understand God's mandate for the Church. We must therefore ask the question, “What is the Church for?” – I would prefer to say – “Who is the Church for”?

THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE REMARKABLE CHURCH

There are, according to Scripture, three basic answers to the question – who is the Church for? And they are concerned with the three dimensions of love to which we are called.

Mark chapter 12 (the Gospel reading from our synod service) gives us vital information in our quest for remarkable churches. “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength and “love your neighbour as yourself”.*

Firstly, we are to love God with all our heart, soul mind and strength. The Church is first of all to love God. It’s for Him.

Secondly, “you shall love your neighbour as yourself”. The Church is for them – for those on the outside – those who have never darkened the doors of our church buildings.

Thirdly, we have the new commandment, which Jesus added to the other two – that Christians should love one another. The Church is for us.

These are the three dimensions or purposes of the Church. Note the balance – the remarkable church is a balanced church.

Let’s look at the first.

1. The Church is for God – that’s pretty obvious and that’s why the world doesn’t understand half the things that we do when we gather to worship. But if it’s for God and He’s pleased, then surely it’s worth doing. However there are some things we do that must seem awfully strange to those who don’t believe in God or don’t realise he’s around.

One of the difficulties we have in New Zealand today is that everybody implicitly accepts that we must love our neighbour – although we may not express it like that – we give to Christian World Service, World Vision, Tear Fund, the Leprosy Mission, the Cancer Society and so on, however people out there can’t see the point in loving God.

There are two things that remarkable churches are concerned about that the world generally isn’t bothered with or interested in. What are they? They are **worship** and **holiness** and you’re only interested in those two things when you are for God.

Worship

Let’s think of worship. Week by week we are inside our beautiful buildings. We sing hymns and songs, we pray, we listen, we stand up, we sit down, we kneel, we stand, we sit, we kneel – as Anglicans are wont to do! And some say, “if all you people would instead go out and help others for an hour on a Sunday that would be much more use”. They don’t understand what we’re doing when we gather together. Who do they think we’re doing this for? We’re doing it for the Living God, I trust.

I have a sneaking suspicion that God doesn't really care whether we're worshipping Him in silence or banging a tambourine or playing an acoustic guitar or a beautiful pipe organ.

God doesn't care how 'high' it is or how 'low' it is. How dressed up we are or whether worship is with a prayer book or power point. (We will all have our preferences – of that there is no doubt!). But from God's perspective, he's asking rather, "How much love is there in it?" How much love is there in our worship? It may lack polish or it may be terribly refined. It may happen in a Cathedral or in a grass hut.

A couple of years ago I was in Cambodia with World Vision. On Sunday we worshipped on a garbage dump – reeking – in a church made of cardboard – no organ or guitar – and it was sensational!

God doesn't say "It must be just so – it must be like this". He says "How much is this my child saying – I love you Father?" That's worship!

Excellence is good – of course it is – and we must strive for it – but it must never ever become a barrier between us and God. When people wonder why we spend time in church, singing, praying and learning, it's just because we're saying, "God, you're worth a bit of our time."

Holiness

The other thing is holiness. Again the world isn't particularly interested or concerned about holiness. It doesn't like the word holiness – (as evidenced by the recent Prostitution Reform Bill and in many other areas). It laughs at it. It has a musty old-fashioned smell about it. But the word "holiness" is such a positive word in Scripture. It's not negative at all. It simply means 'God-like' – 'Christ-like.' Traits hardly valued anywhere in today's world.

God says, "I not only want the worship of your lips – but the holiness of your lives". This also includes integrity, transparency and humility – holiness – they both go together. In fact one without the other is offensive to Him.

The world today doesn't really appreciate either of these. Worship is useless – what's the point? And holiness is offensive to many in this post-modern, pluralistic age where there are no absolutes in behaviour or belief. But these are two primary concerns of the Church. They are both New Testament principles because we are for God.

The remarkable church understands this.

2. The Church is for them

We come to the second dimension of the Church's purpose - To "love your neighbour as yourself". The Church is for them – for those on the outside – those who have never darkened the doors of our buildings.

You see the worship and holiness that we have been talking about could be done in a monastery away from people. We could withdraw from the world and spend our days worshipping.

A church that is only monastic, that only sees itself for God, and forgets the world out there, is forgetting the second dimension of the Church's purpose.

William Temple, that great Archbishop of Canterbury said something like this – "*The Church is the only society on earth that exists primarily for the benefit of its non members*". How do we feel about that? Is that right? Theologically – biblically speaking it is – at least to my way of thinking.

Jesus used his hands for two things. To **serve** people and to **save**. He used them with water to wash dirty feet and he allowed cruel nails to be driven through them. These are the two things we are called to do for our neighbours - for our communities. To serve them and in a sense to save them. Both – neither can be a substitute for the other.

Service

Take service. The parable of the Good Samaritan is enough to tell us that, if there is a need – we must endeavour to meet it. That's a Gospel priority. There are hurting and needy people out there.

It may even include speaking out on political issues. We are to meet people's needs. (In a few moments we will be hearing stories about local churches endeavouring to penetrate their communities – to meet some of those needs).

But we must also remember that if our duty to the world is limited to service alone – to people's physical and emotional needs only – we would be treating them as less than human.

If I care for a person's body and mind and stop there, I'm treating them as less than a person because according to Scripture – a person is someone who is made in God's image. She/he has a dimension that must be met spiritually – and people are crying out desperately to have that need met – even though they may not realise what's wrong.

Study the music – the songs of today. Read popular literature. Watch your TV intelligently – it's essential that we do – it's screaming this out at us, if we will listen. The search for meaning and relevance.

We dare not stop at service – men and women do not live by bread alone – that's very obvious today.

Evangelism

We must have evangelism – the sharing of our faith. It's quite staggering how some react to this word, as if its proselytism – forcing someone against their will. But that's not evangelism in its true biblical sense. Real evangelism – as I understand it – is this, to get people into a right relationship with the living God. And that's the job of the local church.

We have a solemn task and a sacred responsibility of bringing people to God. The Scriptures are very clear about that. Let's break out of the stereotypes that perhaps frighten us. There is no excuse for being rude or offensive. But let's not be ashamed of that, or make apologies. Let's be positive about it. Let's be creative.

Our task is to bring people to God – to turn them around lovingly. To say, “You're running away from God – come to Him – He loves you. He's the kindest person you could ever know”.

We're called to do this as the Church.

That's the second dimension of the Church's purpose. The remarkable Church is for others.

3. The Church is for us

Finally and very briefly. The third thing that the remarkable church will understand is that the Church is for us – for Christians. It's the place where we are to learn to love and respect one another and grow in maturity, even across our differences and disagreements. This is what will impress the world out there – our love for each other.

We may have beautiful buildings. We may have fine strategies. We may have great worship and yet fail miserably. Jesus, the Lord of the Church said, “it is by our love for one another that the world would know....” We must take him seriously! Therefore there will be two things that the remarkable Church will do to foster these, and again they are both New Testament principles – **teaching** and **fellowship**.

Teaching

What are we doing to learn? The tragedy is that some of us stop learning spiritually as children. We have teachers in Sunday School but we need teaching as adults. We can't expect to be taught in 5 to 10 minutes flat on a Sunday morning. Teaching takes time. Someone once said, “sermonettes produce Christianettes!” We must recapture our pulpits. Teaching is important – something Anglicans have been noted for in the past. Let it be true today.

Fellowship.

The other thing is fellowship. Just as in a family there will be different ages and different temperaments, so it is in God's great family.

CS Lewis, that marvellous Christian writer puts it this way. *“With regard to Christian fellowship, the enemy will do one of two things. He'll keep it at the cup of tea level – nice and shallow – or if its getting too deep he will bring suspicion, division and destructive criticism”*

Have you noticed this? The Church is famous for it! Shame on us – the enemy loves to drive a wedge between Christians. We must concentrate on our fellowship and its quality – its absolutely essential. We must love across our differences – but it's not peace or unity at the expense of truth.

CONCLUSION

These then are the three purposes of the Church from a New Testament perspective. They produce remarkable churches. They're timeless, they never change, they're biblical and they're thoroughly Anglican.

I want you to notice how balanced the remarkable church is. Let me recapitulate.

The remarkable church is called:

To love God – the Church is for Him. Therefore we must give time to worship and holiness.

To love our neighbours – the Church is for them, for those on the outside. Therefore we give time and energy to service and evangelism.

To love one another – the Church is for us. Therefore we give time to teaching and to fellowship.

These things will produce fruitfulness in the Church and break through into the community.

We hear much about the failure of the Church today. But is it a failure? Is it irrelevant? Taken globally – I don't think so! The Church's role in helping others is second to none when it penetrates the community. Study the origins of schools, orphanages, hospitals, the abolition of slavery, the improving of factory conditions. They would never have happened but for Jesus Christ and His Church – God working through his people. It can happen again.

Think of the millions in every land who have found a faith to live by and if necessary to die by. God alone knows how many have learned to love Him, to love their neighbours – those on the outside – and to love their fellow Christians through the Church. The Church may never be perfect this side of eternity – but, nevertheless it can be remarkable.

So let's be encouraged. These are exciting days of opportunity for us all. Let's get involved. The best is yet to come! I believe we can make a difference in our hurting and needy world and in our communities. But it will be costly and I don't just mean in financial terms.

It will mean laying aside our petty preferences – our own self-interests.

It will mean turning the Church inside out to face the real world out there.

It will mean truly being "salt" and "light" – being what God has called us, the church, to be.

That's the vision from a New Testament perspective. It's a wonderful challenge to face together. The remarkable Church will be a Church fully relevant to the local community, to the world and to the 21st Century.

Hard? Yes!

Impossible? No!