



## **THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**

**Delivered by the Right Reverend Derek L Eaton  
QSM, MA, Dip Theol, T.T.Cert.  
to the second session of the fifty-third Synod  
of the Diocese of Nelson**

**Given at Christ Church Cathedral, Nelson,  
on Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2006**



**THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**  
**(Synod Sermon)**

**Thursday – 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2006**  
**Christ Church Cathedral, Nelson**

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

Welcome to Nelson and to the second session of our Fifty-third Synod – especially those of you attending for the first time and in particular a warm welcome to the Revds Richard and Carol Drury, Marge Tefft and Aubrey Whitcombe serving respectively in Motueka, Greymouth and Bishopdale.

**WE HAVE A MINISTRY**  
**“I do it all for the sake of the Gospel” 1 Corinthians 9:23**

**I OUR PAST**

This will be my last synod with you as bishop of this diocese. The past 16 years have been exciting ones. Speaking for Alice and myself they have been some of the best years of our lives as we have endeavoured to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in this part of his Church.

In December 1989, we heard with much trepidation, the result of Nelson's electoral synod. The next six months before my Episcopal ordination were some of the most difficult of my ministry as I wrestled with my opinion of myself and the lack of gifts I perceived for the task ahead – to say nothing of the unworthiness that I personally felt to be a bishop.

Sixteen years have passed and I still wonder how I ended up as your bishop. The only thing I felt I had to offer was a passion for Jesus Christ and for the mission of the Church in the world as clearly mandated in the Church's book, the Holy Scriptures. With only 5 years of ordained ministry in New Zealand and the rest in North Africa and Egypt – it had to be his doing – of that I had no doubt – the role of bishop is not one I sought.

That God, by his Spirit gives gifts and insights and even some wisdom, I am wholly convinced, having experienced his grace over almost 50 years, with more than 30 of those in full time ministry in some exciting and dangerous places and not all of them overseas! It can be just as dangerous and exciting here in Aotearoa – New Zealand!

It's been a privilege to serve in this diocese, with this family, with so many talented and dedicated people and with such a wonderful team. Our unity, though we are far from being monochrome, is something to be treasured. Small diocese though we may be, we have captured the attention of many around the world and have even featured in research articles and chapters of books.

When I was waiting to come to Nelson after the election in 1989, I was told by two bishops of this church, "how does it feel to be the last bishop to preside over the Nelson Diocese before – of necessity – being absorbed into Wellington or Christchurch?" That was not to be and during the 1990's we became one of the fastest growing dioceses in the Western Anglican world.

There was an amazing turnaround which affected us in many ways – from having the oldest averaged aged clergy in New Zealand we became the diocese with arguably the youngest. From having the least academically qualified clergy we now have some of the most qualified. From being on the brink of going under financially (according to the Berl report and others) we clawed our way back to viability – financial health. The team work has been remarkable. From being depressed as a diocese we now have the confidence to take our place on the world's stage in missional and theological thinking and practice. In the words of the psalmist, "*This is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes*". (Psalm 118:23)

I say it again; it has been a tremendous privilege to serve you – to serve with you – and to serve our Lord through the Diocese of Nelson. This place has become home for us and it is our intention to ultimately retire here at some time in the future when we return from ministry in North Africa and Egypt.

## **II THE FUTURE**

I want to say this with regard to the Church – I personally believe that the best is yet to come. We are yet to see the Church really come into its own in response to the call of its Lord and in response to the needs of planet earth. I would urge us all to determine to look to him, the Living God, to be faithful to him and the Lord of the Church as we endeavour to live under the authority of Scripture. I don't say it will be easy – we face massive challenges, as Christians, as Anglicans worldwide, as members of the Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia and as citizens of this world. We must determine to be participants and not just observers. There is much yet to be accomplished for his glory and for the sake of our suffering and needy world.

Before us in this synod there are some weighty things to be considered. The next months are going to be busy ones with our Clergy and Lay Leaders' Conference – the subject matter of which is crucial for any Christian or church determined to play a responsible part in the affairs of this world – the Challenge of Islam!

Then there is the Electoral Synod when you will responsibly and prayerfully meet to choose a new bishop to lead you in the mission of this church to the world out there.

### **III THE PRESENT**

This brings me to the subject of this synod address. I want to offer, what I hope might be some helpful biblical insights on leadership in the Church and our motivation. To do this I want us to look at 1 Corinthians chapter 9.

I have entitled this address “We have a ministry” with a subtitle – “I do it all for the sake of the Gospel” (v 23)

We have a ministry – now whether you think you are a leader or not this for all of us, because we believe in the priesthood of all believers – don’t we? Anglicans have always believed that – even if at times in the past, this belief has been overlooked. To use a more modern idiom which we in our diocese are familiar with – we believe in “every member ministry.”

We are all ministers of Christ in some way. That’s what being a Christian is from a New Testament perspective and our Anglican Church’s teaching is in full accord. So I am assuming this afternoon that our desire is to be in that category described by the apostle Paul as ‘good’. We want to be good ministers of Jesus Christ – every one of us – ordained or lay. I’ve always loved that phrase of St. Paul’s and I have often prayed that it would be an accurate description of me – and I hope you do for yourself.

So as we face the future, the Synod before us and an imminent Electoral Synod, let’s assess our own commitment to the ministries that God has called us to – whether as a pastor of a congregation, as a bishop or potential bishop, a home group leader, a lay preacher, a Sunday School teacher, an administrator, a homemaker, a lawyer, a farmer or whatever!

What drives us – what motivates us? What are the under-girding principles of my ministry? We are going to be looking at something quite unpopular in the Church today. Something often overlooked – even ignored – something that moves us away from the world’s value systems that we have imbibed even in our church life.

In our epistle reading, the apostle Paul is talking about himself in a very personal way. He lays bare the very foundations upon which his apostolic ministry is built.

#### **The cost: surrendering our rights**

He outlines the sacrifices – the cost if you like – that he was prepared to make for the sake of the Gospel and the ministry to which God had called him.

There is absolutely no doubt about the passion that burned in his heart – a passion that concerned the Gospel. The whole chapter is full of references to “the Gospel”. Verse 16 – “*I proclaim the Gospel for an obligation is laid on me and woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel.*”

Again, verse 23, “*I do it all for the sake of the Gospel*”. I believe there is much here in this chapter for us.

George Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, captured this point in his enthronement address in Canterbury Cathedral in 1990 *“It will be woe to us if we preach religion instead of the Gospel; woe to us if we seek to live off the inheritance of the past and fail to build on those foundations for the future; woe to us if we preach a message that looks only to inner piety and does not relate the truth to the world around.”*

In the busyness of our ministries, in the daily pressures of living, it’s so easy to forget the very essence of our calling. I know this in my own life.

As we face an Electoral Synod – new leadership; as we consider the problems that our beloved Communion faces; as we think through the vital issue of Bishopdale Theological College and the training of men and women for ministry, it’s all too easy to forget or even dismiss the lofty feelings, the noble sentiments, the undeniable passion that burned within us 10, 20 or 30 years ago, or 6 months ago or whenever – when we would have sacrificed anything for the sake of the Gospel.

It is all too easy to be captured by fear. To play politics perhaps – even to scheme in an ungodly way and all of a sudden we realise that we are flawed and fallen creatures in need of God’s grace and his wisdom.

In this passage of Scripture, it is the Gospel and its demands which dominate St. Paul’s thinking and it leads him to the sacrifices that he is prepared to make. What about us? Are we prepared to think about that?

Today, we don’t have apostles in quite the same way as Paul and the others who were eye witnesses to the risen Christ; nevertheless, this apostolic mission to take the Gospel to our communities and to the world, has devolved upon the whole Church. And this synod and its business, and even the Electoral Synod – dare I say it – are not to be just ends in themselves.

The Church is to be apostolic – it has an apostolic mission – not to itself but to the world. All that we do should be subservient to that mission. It’s not only this passage that tells us this but the whole of the New Testament drives us in that direction. A study the life of Jesus and the lives of the apostles and their letters to the developing churches should convince of this fact.

So together, let’s examine the extent of Paul’s commitment, the details of his self-surrender, the depths of his self-sacrifice and let’s consider how this applies to us today in our calling and in our ministries as we face the future.

There are some important principles to guide us. Here’s the first.

### **1. His financial rights (vv 1-18)**

I want you to note with me that the Apostle surrendered his rights – and in particular his financial rights. There’s much about money in this chapter which we don’t have time to delve into at any length, but let me briefly draw out the main teaching. It’s all about Christian liberty and about the voluntary curtailment of that liberty – our freedom as Christians.

Why is the Apostle advocating the curtailment of this right (these freedoms) that we have as Christians? Why? *'For the sake of the Gospel'*. (v 23) This is biblical principle of some magnitude and some of us never get it.

What's Paul driving at here? What are the rights that he is willing to forgo – to give up? This may sound strange; this goes against natural instinct – what we feel, especially as we live in a very rights conscious age, where we insist on our rights – we demand them. But might there not be another way of looking at this – a Christ-like way.

Paul has rights as an apostle, (v2) he has financial rights as a minister of the Gospel, he has rights to security, to food and drink, to marriage and the support of family (v 4-5) He has a right to be supported by the churches. And there is no doubt that he did have these rights – he goes on to use a number of illustrations in order to prove the point.

Then we come to the middle of verse 12 and it whacks us between the eyes! It's a new paragraph. It begins, *"Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right"*. The apostle Paul had surrendered the financial rights to which he was entitled. He says so in verse 15 *"I have not made use of any of these rights"* Why not? He's entitled to them isn't he? Why doesn't he stand on his rights? We would – we do! We insist on them – we agitate for them – we get incensed if they are infringed upon. Why does Paul not stand on his rights? Why is he prepared to surrender them? There is only one answer, *"for the sake of the Gospel"* (v 23).

Did you know that in our diocese we have some people – ordained and lay – who forgo full stipends? The Lord has blessed them in other ways. I know that it's not possible for all to do this but they have blessed the work of ministry by their sacrifice for the sake of the Gospel.

Paul's sacrifice – his surrender of his rights – is a challenge to all of us on how we view our ministries. Is it just a means of earning a living, or is it a vocation – a calling from the Lord of the Church? Read this chapter again carefully – it's a challenge to us all in these 'rights conscious' days where our comfort – our rights – appear paramount.

There were those who were saying that Paul was only in it for the money and for the status. So for the sake of the Gospel – for the sake of the reputation of the Gospel – he renounced the very rights he asserted he had. The Gospel and its reputation meant far more to Paul than his financial security – his comfort and his status. Can I say that?

Paul did not want to hinder the progress of the Gospel in any way. That's the first principle. I hope that is absolutely clear in our minds. What is it? – It has nothing to do with being ordained or not. When the progress of the Gospel and financial gain are in competition with one another, as they can be at times – the Gospel always takes precedence. This principle is true for us as individual Christians. It's true for us together as a local church or parish and it needs to be true for our diocese as a whole.

Here's the question – it's a hard question – for each of us. It will affect our choices in this synod, in our budgeting, in our thinking about Bishopdale Theological College and the Electoral College for a new bishop. It will touch each of us personally. It will touch our parish and it will touch our diocese.

The question – which is more important to me – the spread of the Gospel at my own expense, (my parish's expense, my diocese's expense) **OR** our own living standards (our comfort) at the Gospel's expense? We have a choice, which will it be? Which will we put first? God's Gospel or our own personal wealth and comfort? It's a hard question but that is plainly the first lesson we learn here in this chapter.

Would we take the Gospel into places where it would mean financial hardship for us individually, as parishes, as a diocese? More specifically – Bishopdale Theological College – think of the cost to me maybe, if I get behind it and what will my parish have to do without? It's a difficult call isn't it? There is a cost. But if the Lord of the Church is in it – if it's his desire, if it's genuinely his will, then do we really have a choice? Paul was willing to surrender his financial rights, his security, for the sake of the Gospel.

## **2. His personal independence (vv19-23)**

We come to the second principle in this chapter. In some ways it's even more striking. Here we see that Paul surrenders his personal independence and again we can ask the question, "why"? And the answer: "for the sake of the Gospel". It's this very principle that has challenged many approaching an age when they might draw a pension, ease back a little and go fishing or whatever, to soldier on in some way. Paul again talks about his freedom and rights. Was he not a free man – a citizen of Rome? He wasn't a slave – he wasn't anybody's servant. But he renounces this freedom also – he refuses to live for himself. It reminds us of someone else doesn't it? – Our Lord Jesus. He who was not a slave made himself a slave voluntarily. (Read Philippians 2 sometime).

Paul says here, (v 19) "*though I am free, with respect to all – I have made myself a slave to all*". Paul is determined to give himself to the service of others. He is determined to give his life seeking the highest good of others – to be their servant. Why? Why does he choose to do this? – Paul, you'll end up in prison or worse! Haven't you done enough? "*I do it for the sake of the Gospel*". His passion never dimmed with the passing of the years.

Firstly, he was prepared to lose financially in order to gain advantage for the Gospel. And now, secondly, he is prepared to lose his personal independence – his freedom – in order to win others to Jesus Christ.

There can be no doubt that this is slavery that he is talking about. Making himself a slave for others – to serve them – it's a very costly thing and we too need to learn this in our ministries.

Do we ever think of our ministries in terms of slavery? It's a most unpopular and distasteful thought in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This is definitely not the world's thinking is it? – it goes against the grain.

The minister of Christ has made him or herself a slave. They have given up their independence in order to give themselves in the service of others. This is the costliness of ministry and it affects us all who name the name of Christ.

Very briefly St Paul says, *“To the Jew I became a Jew, to the Gentile, a Gentile, to the weak I became weak”*. He was prepared to be vulnerable. The general principle he goes on to assert – we know it so well – *“I became all things to all people in order that I might by all means save some”* (v 22).

That phrase *“all things to all people”* has become very seriously misrepresented and misunderstood today. To describe somebody as “as all things to all people” is a slur – isn’t it? It’s certainly not how we would want to be described. It means a person with no back-bone – commonly called a “filleted Christian” because their back-bone has been removed – they have no spine – changing sides all the time. No courage of their convictions – an unprincipled compromiser – *“all things to all people”*. But that’s definitely not what the Apostle is talking about here.

Do we think Paul was like that? Never – he was nothing of the kind. Paul would never surrender his theological or his moral or ethical principles to anybody. Though he was as solid as a rock in his Faith – he was as pliable as a reed in his love for people. He was willing to identify himself with others in all things indifferent or neutral. Why? For the sake of the Gospel: in order to win men, women and children to Christ. Verse 23 is really our text this afternoon, *“I do it all for the sake of the Gospel”*.

Now the application of this for today is very uncomfortable – at least it is for me. This could be one of the most uncomfortable chapters in the whole of the New Testament and possibly it should be for any Christian who desires to live under the authority of Holy Scripture and who is serious about their commitment to Jesus Christ and his Church and his agenda for it.

We prize our independence, our freedom and our privacy. We like to live our life in our own way – to be our own master. We don’t want to be anybody’s servant let alone slave. But in order to reach people and to touch our communities we must be willing, in a sense, to live their way. We have to be willing to identify with them in their culture in all matters that are theologically or morally neutral.

We have to be willing to surrender our personal independence for their sakes – to listen to them in order to understand them. We have to be willing to think with them and to have an interest in their interests. We have to be willing to suffer with them, to know what it means to enter into people’s loneliness, their lostness, their frustrations and their domestic unhappiness – to feel the pain of these things with them. To weep with those who weep. We will never do these things sitting in our grand buildings or living in a Christian ghetto.

The Lord of the Church and the harvest tells us to go – to go out. Too often in the past we have said to the community, you come, come to us – we have the answers when the Lord of the Church has always said, – “no, you go – go out with the Good News”. In a word we have to be willing to be their slave – their servant – in order to

win them. “*For though I am free with respect to all – I have made myself a slave to all*”, says the apostle (v 19).

I wonder if there is anyone here who would dare to describe themselves as the Apostle does as a slave? Have we ever begun to think of ourselves in these terms – individually – as parishes – as a diocese? We hear of “missionary dioceses” – it’s a great term – but a “slave diocese”? I wouldn’t dare, would you? Servants of other people: putting their interests, their needs above ours as individuals, as parishes as a diocese. Why would we do that? “For the sake of the Gospel”. This touches my money, my possessions and my independence. I am happy that the vision / logo of the new Bishopdale College picks this up, “*visionary servant leaders – vibrant serving churches*”, let’s make that true!

### **3. His physical comforts (vv 24 – 27)**

Then thirdly, Paul surrenders his physical comforts.

All of us know that we are soft by nature. We like our comforts don’t we? We can justify them in most cases if we wish. Discipline is not a popular word today and neither is sacrifice. They are alien concepts and they don’t come naturally to us – and Paul was no exception. He was a human being with human fallibility and failures.

In the last paragraph of chapter 9 the Apostle refers to the Greek games and to athletes. He urges his readers to keep in the Christian race and with dedication to keep running. He talks about training, habits and self-discipline. He uses the example of athletes training to win a crown of leaves which wither and die and so on.

We too must discipline ourselves – why? For the sake of the Gospel, lest having proclaimed the Good News to others Paul says, “I should be disqualified and I should prove not to be a genuine Christian at all but a fake”. What a solemn thought. If the great St Paul could envisage the possibility that at the very end, after having spent his life in proclaiming the Good News, he himself might prove a fake – a spurious Christian, how much more should we?

The only ultimate evidence of our salvation – of our being Christian – of our relationship to God, is not really what we say – it’s how we live – so for the sake of the Gospel there may be no dichotomy between what we are saying and how we are living.

In closing, let me re-cap for a moment and make some application. This is an impressive chapter, don’t you think? You would have to agree with me that the totality of the Apostle’s self-surrender is very impressive indeed. It is a challenge to our discipleship – our Christian walk – our ministries.

He was prepared to sacrifice three of humanity’s treasures, or three of our most jealously guarded rights. What are they? Financial gain, personal independence and physical comfort. They were his by right but he was prepared to sacrifice them. Why? For the sake of the Gospel.

The Gospel was so precious to him, the Good News of Jesus was so important, the spread of the Gospel was such an urgent priority in his life, that for the sake of the Gospel he was willing to give up his rights.

What about me? What about each of us? Paul was willing to surrender his rights financially. He was willing to give up his independence to give himself in the service of others – even to be a slave. He was willing to give up the temptation to pamper himself – to become an athlete in the sense of disciplining himself – for the sake of the Gospel – all for the sake of the Gospel.

#### **IV CONCLUSION**

Finally, I am going to take the risk in saying this. I think most of us here might not be ashamed of the name “evangelical” with a small ‘e’. I hope that’s true. I am not talking about churchmanship, or a party, or the way the word is often used by the media to describe the American President, or whoever! It’s a biblical word – a beautiful word and it’s related to the things we have been talking about. It simply means good news. It comes from the Greek word for ‘Good News’ or ‘Gospel’.

##### **1 ‘evangelical’**

An evangelical Christian is a Gospel Christian. He or she is devoted to the Gospel – the Good News from God. Could we describe ourselves like that? Forget the old accusations of un-lovingness, fundamentalism, narrow-mindedness – and you find these things in every section of the church – sadly. An evangelical Christian believes in the revealed truth from God and embraces it in his or her own life. They are absolutely determined to live according to the Gospel and to honour it through the way they live their lives.

It includes individual righteousness of course, and social righteousness and justice in the community that’s honouring to the Gospel because it is consistent with the Gospel.

An evangelical Christian seeks to spread the Good News – they are determined to do so! They believe the doctrines of the Gospel. They endeavour to live an ethical life that is consistent with the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ. That’s an evangelical Christian. It has nothing to do with styles of worship or music or ecclesiastical garb or the lack of it.

What is an evangelical church or parish and one could say diocese? It’s one that believes the Gospel and that teaches the Gospel. It’s life and ethos, its structures, whether physical or not, whether buildings or programmes, and all its ministers, including its bishop, are subservient to the Gospel.

It’s a church – a diocese for others. It’s a church for the community – for the whole world. It’s a church, with missionary congregations, forever reaching out beyond itself.

However sadly, some churches, some dioceses have what could be called heretical structures. The doctrines, the beliefs might be orthodox but the structures are heretical. Why do I say that? Because their structures actually deny what they say they proclaim.

For a parish, for a diocese not to be heretically structured, it must determine its programmes and its ministry, not by its own self-centredness, self interest and petty preferences but by the service to which it is called to in the world. The Church must turn itself outwards towards the world – the community in which it is situated. It has got to learn to live EX-centredly – perhaps one might say the eccentricity of the Church – not because we are a bunch of strange people – but we are to live this EX-centred life. We’ve got to turn the Church inside out to face the world out there and to serve the community – the world in which we live and to which Jesus came. Why? There’s really only one answer and it’s the answer the Apostle gives us – ‘for the sake of the Gospel’.

You see there’s really no possible justification for electing a bishop – for creating a new Bishopdale Theological College – for restructuring a parish or a diocese, simply for the survival of the Church in the increasing secularism of today. There is no justification at all - or for that matter for the comfort of the Church – to make us feel good, or for the prestige of the Church or for the triumphalism of the Church.

Why do we do what we do? Why are we working on new initiatives – why are we electing a new bishop for our diocese in September? A thoughtful and conscientious Christian and a true, committed Anglican can only answer one way – for the sake of the Gospel.

Church strategy must be Gospel strategy – remember that as we do the business of synod. We do this – we do what we do – to reach out and to impact our communities, our world for Jesus Christ.

## **2. A question and a challenge**

As the Episcopal baton is about to be handed to another, I leave you with a question and a challenge. The question – how much do I care about the Gospel? How much do we together (as church) care about the Gospel? And how much do I care about the God whose Gospel it is? That’s the question.

And the challenge. In this synod and in its business, (and I’m also thinking about the future of a Bishopdale Theological College and the Electoral Synod in September and all the deliberations before-hand) – are we willing, for the sake of the Gospel and for no other reason, to think deeply, to pray unselfishly for what is best, and to give sacrificially? That’s the challenge.

The Apostle Paul said, *‘I do it all for the sake of the Gospel’*. May that be true for each of us.