

Episcopal ordination of Tim Harris
Diocese of Adelaide
20th November 2011.
Feast of Christ the King
Ephesians 3:14 – 4:3

For the 15 years I had in my parish prior to becoming Bishop, I celebrated the Sunday before Advent in the alternative manner as 'Stir Up Sunday.'

Although it was always a popular service – which is why we continued the tradition – I must confess that it was probably the theological low point in our particular parish year because, instead of a 'stir-up' sermon, we used to mix-up a Christmas cake in front of the congregation – a cake that was then taken away to be baked ready to be cut on Christmas day.

As the ingredients were brought forward from the congregation to be mixed into the bowl we reflected on various aspects of our lives. The eggs were symbols of new life in Christ – and they were tipped into the bowl and beaten up.

Flour was, of course the basic ingredient of bread and we reflected on the breaking of bread, that was mixed in. Then came the fruit and nuts and raisins that were also stirred in.

Fruit enabled us to reflect on the fruit of the Spirit. Then, in the time of confession, we added the raisins – because you'll notice that it contains the word 'sins!'

And we added nuts as a reminder of the nutty things we do with our lives.....

I did warn you that it was the theological low-point in our year.

I can't help contrasting that to the primary theme for this Sunday before Advent, the feast of Christ the King, which must surely be the theological *high* point of the church's calendar - and to the epistle for this service which comes from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This letter, despite its obvious parallels with the letter to the Colossians, is unique amongst Paul's letters, because of the picture of the exalted Christ presented throughout the letter; an image that has caused some to doubt whether it was in fact written by Paul.

However, I'm coming down on the side of those scholars who aren't convinced by these relatively recent arguments and who see the mind and heart of Paul all the way through it.

But who *are* united in thinking that maybe it wasn't written to the Ephesian church in particular - who Paul knew so well - but to the Gentile churches in general.

After a surprisingly short salutation Paul launches into an outpouring of praise to the risen exalted Christ – one long sentence with the constant refrain; 'in praise of his glory', 'in praise of his glory'. He then moves into a

prayer for the church; a prayer in which he wanders off on various tangents – before coming back to the focus of his prayer.

And it's the final verses of this prayer that I want to draw from this afternoon.

Again it is one long sentence:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

In many respects it's an elaboration from the earlier part of his prayer where he prays for *'the eyes of our hearts to be enlightened so that we might know God's incomparably great power for those who believe.'*

Now he begins to define that power: a power that works from the inside out, transforming us from self-centred individuals into disciples who, through the experience of God's amazing grace, are ready to commit our lives in the service of that love.

However, I think that there is another way of reading this passage that is possibly even more profound, and maybe more reflective of Paul's intention in writing. And that is to understand it as a corporate prayer rather than an individualistic prayer.

One thing that stands out in Paul's letters is his high ecclesiology: Like your new Bishop, Paul was passionate about the church!

Bill Hybels (from WillowCreek in Chicago) has a provocative axiom that sums it up: 'The church is God's plan for the redemption of the world.'

If we return to the Epistle, we note that, not only are all the references plural, but Paul begins this short passage by referring to them corporately as 'The family of God' and then, at the end of the passage, he again prays collectively for them as 'The church'.

Reading this prayer from *this* perspective reveals a powerful vision of what it means to be the Church. Firstly he prays that:

'...out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Paul is doing no more than reaffirming something he had already written at the end of the previous chapter when he said *'And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.'*

Although Paul speaks often about personal holiness and personal discipleship he has absolutely no perception of an individual faith – everything is worked out in community with other believers.

And it's within this ecclesia, that God is most fully present and glorified.

Jesus himself said that *'where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'*

Secondly Paul prays that: *you (the Church), being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,*

I am not sure what the situation is like here in this Diocese, but one of the greatest challenges facing the church in my part of the world is apathy: And sadly it's not apathy toward the church but apathy from within the church.

If we have no personal experience of God's amazing grace then we will have no ability to even begin to comprehend the breadth of God's love.

And if we cannot comprehend how wide, and long and high and deep in the love of Christ then our worship will be stunted: it will be reduced to mere formality – a barren shell with no substance.

Then - to quote Miroslav Wolff - we'll begin to practice exclusion rather than embrace because we have a very limited view of God's love – who is accepted and acceptable and who is not!

This is the part of the prayer that should take our breath away.

And thirdly that the Church may *'know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.'*

While this is more commonly used to describe our own personal discipleship – our journey into 'Christlikeness' – it is just as possible to interpret this in relation to the growth of 'The Church' into the fullness of what it is called to be.

The word 'you' can mean 'you (plural) together' – you as the Body of Christ, filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

An Acts 2 church where: *they 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Every one of them was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to*

anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people....'

So how does all this relate to what we are doing here this afternoon?

Four years ago we invited an Archdeacon from this Diocese to help us do something new and risky: to plant and establish a new theological College within the Diocese of Nelson.

Tim Harris, together with Fiona and Jon, left everything behind here (including family) and travelled over the 'ditch' and very quickly became part of our family. We have loved them, and already we miss them!

Bishopdale Theological College is now firmly established and deeply respected in only its 5th year of operation. The first students graduated with a Bachelor of Theology last year and Bishops throughout the country (whether they agree with it or not) are inspired by both the vision and the model - and by the leadership of its first Dean. Tim arrived at the beginning of my second year as Bishop of Nelson and, in a very real and tangible way, he helped to form me. He very quickly became a friend, a confidant and a mentor. I am deeply grateful to the Diocese of Adelaide for the gift that we have had for these four years.

But the greatest gift he brought with him was his passionate vision for the church when it is being all that God called it to be.

Tim recognises that the most effective mission and evangelism will flow from vibrant communities of faith as it did back in the beginning of Acts and I believe that vibrant, authentic Christianity is the whole point of Paul's prayer.

I would like to take these last moments however, to continue with the very next verses, and address them personally to Tim, although I hope it will be relevant to every single one here to has responded to the call to ministry – lay or ordained.

Paul writes: 'As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.'

I have observed many different models of Episcopal ministry over these past five years and, to some extent the model reflects the culture within which the ministry operates. But the model also reflects the particular personality of the incumbent.

To some extent it transcends theological preference - similar models are found right across the ecclesiological spectrum.

I have watched the prince/bishops who revel in the status. I have seen the autocratic, the angry, the disillusioned, the teacher, the preacher, the visionary, the benevolent, the pastor, the manager: the wild and the mild!

You will find your own pathway and I know you will walk it with integrity.

But I simply want to offer these final words as a reflection at the beginning of your new ministry.

1. 'Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.'

You have such a clear calling from God upon your life and this has been recognised by the Archbishop and Diocesan Council and affirmed by the Diocese in the moving service of ordination.

It is a privilege to be here with so many others to pray with you and for you.

What follows is a description of the 'life worthy of the calling'

2. Be completely humble and gentle.

Humility and gentleness were certainly not popular values in the time of Paul. They had connotations of a

cowering, cringing servility. They're still not found in any of the lists highlighting the top ten qualities of effective leadership.

And yet humility and gentleness come at the top of Paul's list.

Humility might best be described as a self-effacing self-awareness.

St Augustine once wrote: *'Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility.'*

Gentleness has also been maligned because it has been misunderstood. Aristotle described the Greek term for gentleness ('praotés' or 'praus') as the balance between being too angry and never being angry at all.

As Barclay elaborates: *'the person who is 'praus' is kindled by indignation at the wrongs and sufferings of others, but is never moved to anger by the wrongs and insults he or she has to bear.'*

Francis de Sales said: *'Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing can be so gentle as real strength.'*

Be completely humble and gentle.

3. Be patient, bearing with one another in love.

The frustration of being a Bishop is that you often have to work alongside people who just don't get it! You'll be frustrated and you'll be disappointed.

But be patient. Give each situation time and love – and the word Paul uses again here is 'agapé' love.

This is the quality of your ministry that will lead people to trust you.

Finally:

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Unity!

Seems to be one of the most talked about values within the Anglican Communion, but the one we are least able to maintain.

I was at a meeting recently together with many of our Bishops and Ministry Educators where they were asked for a definition that best reflected the uniqueness of Anglicanism.

And you know the best they could come up with?

‘Unity in Diversity!’

We seem to value unity as a standout and standalone value but the Bible always has a qualifier to the unity it describes.

This passage, for example does not speak about a ‘spirit of Unity’ but ‘Unity of the Spirit’. It is ‘the Spirit’ who will lead us into all truth.

In the third part of the prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus is praying for the church that is yet to be – those ‘who will believe in me through their (the disciples) message.’ He then prays as follows: *‘I have given them the glory that you gave me, so that they may be one – I in them*

and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity.’

So, the unity that is described here is a spiritual unity – at one with God who in his very nature is three in one – a unity that, only then, flows through the bond of peace within the church.

Tim, the call for unity will be the tightrope you will find yourself walking over and over again because there is much that would threaten or destroy the unity of the church. And yet, at the same time, we know that nothing undermines our mission as much as our *disunity*.

So:

Be humble and gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love and make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

And in the final verses of the previous chapter:

‘Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.’