

Sunday 22 May, 2016

A sermon preached The Dean on the occasion of Trinity Sunday, at St Paul's Cathedral, London.

I bring you warm greetings from the Archbishop of Melbourne and Primate of Australia, Dr Philip Freier, and the congregations and Chapter of 'our' St Paul's Cathedral. Like your own Cathedral, we also are located in the very heart of our city; a three-spired neo-gothic sandstone Cathedral surrounded by banks and office-blocks, train stations and tram stops; an iconic presence overlooking the wide river Yarra that by its very presence is at least a reminder, if not an invitation, to keep looking for the presence of God the Holy Trinity at the heart of our metropolis.

Let me take you back eight or so weeks. On the evening of Maundy Thursday, in the darkness of the sacrament chapel of 'our' St Paul's Cathedral a small group of worshippers sat and prayed. The sounds of the city, the ring of passing trams, the urgent alarm of the occasional emergency vehicle, are reminders of the life that continues around us. The gold and precious stones of the mosaic altarpiece reflect twelve candles that surround the bread and wine of the Eucharist of the Last Supper. Fresh palm and olive branches have turned a small corner of Melbourne's Cathedral into our own Gethsemane.

And it is there, in the intimacy of that prayer space, that the words that we have just heard as today's gospel reading were read in real time and in context as it were; echoing the words of farewell spoken by Jesus to his disciples in the upper room of the Last Supper or on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus telling his friends about his immediate departure from them, foretelling his betrayal, pointing to the death that would become the means of God's glory. Jesus washing his friends' feet and calling them to loving service, breaking bread and sharing a cup of wine, and instructing them to remember him by this meal: 'by this all shall know that you are my disciples, if you love one another'.

His disciples listen, at times stunned and perplexed, at other moments understanding and full of insight. 'Now you no longer speak in parables, but in plain speech', one responds to the announcement that Jesus will leave them to return to the Father who had sent him. Most of the time, though, the disciples share their profound confusion: 'How can we know the Father?', one disciple is asking, 'how can we know the way to where you are going', another questions. And Jesus gently admonishes them, responds to their queries. He tells them that this is the very way to the Father and assures them that if they know him they have seen the Father.

Throughout his conversation with his eleven friends –Judas has already departed into the darkness of the night of betrayal –Jesus gives them answers like the teacher they knew him to be. After the resurrection, it will be Mary Magdalene, who first understands that Jesus is more than the rabboni, the teacher. At table with him now, the disciples hear his words, but take in only the immediate: Jesus, their teacher, will leave them, and will go to prepare a place for them to be with him in future. One of their own will purposefully betray him, and so break up their circle of friendship. And yet Jesus calls them to love one another, to show forth his love to others. And it is in doing the work of love, Jesus tells them, that they have a part of him that will last beyond the hatred and persecution he foretells for them, and which he will himself share before the night is over.

The love that is stronger than death; the greater love that leads this man to lay down his life for his friends; the love that comes from the one who sent Jesus into the world, and whom he calls his Father. As a reminder of that love, and of that teaching of sacrifice, Jesus promises his friends the comforter in times of loss, the defender in times of adversity, the advocate in times of indictment: 'the Spirit of truth, who will guide you into all truth'. That Spirit, the free gift of the Father sent by the Christ, will be a constant witness to what they, burdened by confusion and the sense of immanent loss, cannot now comprehend, cannot now bear. That Spirit is the Spirit of truth, who 'will speak whatever he hears' the Son proclaim in the Father's name. That Spirit will tell things that are to come, and elucidate things that have been. 'He will take what is mine and proclaim it to you', Jesus tells his friends.

God's Spirit will help them to recall his words following the emotional upheaval of that last night and day in his presence. He will enable them to make sense of both what Jesus did –breaking break to foreshadow a broken body on the cross, sharing blood to foretell the shedding of his blood 'for their forgiveness of sins'—and what Jesus said—that his betrayal and suffering would be the moment in which he would be glorified by doing the will of the Father who sent him; that his death would be the moment in which the Father's love for the world would be revealed; and that his final breath would be the moment in which the Spirit would be given to the world.

Surrounded by the darkness of the night before Good Friday, for the disciples the promise of Another to comfort us, to remind us and lead us into truth, was likely to be overshadowed by the enormity of the cross. Just as it is for us who follow in their re-living Christ's steps to the cross: as the night in which these words were spoken comes to an end and we re-live the immediate 'things to come' in the trial and death of Jesus, the need for a comforter, for One who will reassure us that Christ's absence will not be forever, may be greater than the Spirit of counsel, even of truth.

Our perception, too, may be overshadowed by the darkness of Good Friday, just as the sun was eclipsed that day. At the foot of the cross, we may not even notice the very act in which that Spirit is sent, as Jesus gives up his own Spirit and breathes his last. But it is there, on the cross, that he sends forth into the world the Guide who takes what is the Father's as spoken by the Son and reminds us of that message in order to glorify both. It is there, on the cross that the Spirit is sent to lead us on our own journey through life to share in their glory, to be our guide as we navigate the questions that challenge us two thousand years later.

Beyond the Gethsemanes we create to watch with Christ lie our bustling Cathedrals, welcoming hundreds of thousands of visitors, pilgrims and worshippers. And beyond the doors of our Cathedrals lie the great cities we serve: cities where many long for a Spirit of truth to be a reliable guide in the confusing realities of our day-to-day living. Especially in times of great uncertainty like today's, when the political, social and economic systems we have taken for granted are redefined, transformed or simply eroded, many long for a voice that speaks truthfully, with integrity; that offers words of guidance and grace.

As Cathedrals serving our great cities, we are places where people may turn in their seeking and longing. We are places of discernment: enabling visitors and pilgrims share in the quiet of our chapels to listen for personal words of reassurance and revelation by the Spirit of counsel and comfort. We are places of invitation: places where through our proclamation and our thinking and praying together we enable one another to bring the same kind of questions that the disciples brought to their departing friend: 'How can we know the Father?', 'How can we know the way to where you are going?', 'How can we share in your life when you are no longer with us?'

As Cathedrals we are places that naturally invite these and other life-transforming questions: we invite them where visitors write down their personal prayer requests. We invite them where tourists enter into conversation with Cathedral clergy or experience the ministry of our Chaplains. We invite them in our Bible studies and enquirer programs. We live them out in the sacrament of unity which is the reason for our commitment to reconciliation. We proclaim them through our service to the homeless, the refugees, and recent migrants, and by our advocacy for a fairer, most just, more godly society. We invite them in discussions and lectures, and by provoking people's thoughts through the work of our institutes. We sit still with them in our worship, through the beauty of our music and our spaces.

And as we invite, discuss and sit with the questions that have been articulated under the shadow of the cross, and have remained with us through the ages, we may be afforded answers: the sense that God our Father loves and cares for us, the assurance that God the Son has called us by name and forgiven our sins, and the awareness of God the Spirit is present with us right now –the answers of the gospel of the Trinity of love. The

things said to us now, the things that we may not have been able to bear then, the things spoken to us by the Spirit of truth.

As Cathedrals we are places of the personal exploration of the gospel of the Trinity of love, enabling those who come through our doors to join in asking the unspoken questions of the disciples. That ministry of invitation is reflected in the flickering of a candle lit as a sign of prayer, and confirmed in the word of assurance of a Chaplain to a visitor. And so a ministry that is first of all personal and private, spoken into the darkness of the waiting space between Last Supper and the Cross, is given a very public and corporate dimension enabling our confident witness to those we serve.

It is the gospel of the Trinity of love that equips us to speak words of confidence and hope into the cities around us. Words of hope that do not disappoint; words of hope for eternal life: 'All that the Father has is mine'. 'All that is mine, the Spirit will declare to you'. 'Abide in me as I abide in you'. 'By this all shall know that you are my disciples, if you love another'.

Now to the Father, who called us by name to share in his grace; to the Son, who took away our sin to share his new life; to the Holy Spirit, who speaks words of peace in our hearts and fill them with love; to the Holy and Undivided Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, majesty and might, through all generations, now and forever. Amen.