

150th Anniversary Sermon

Now I don't consider myself to be that old.

But when I was younger:

- *You didn't smoke 'grass' – you mowed it and dope was an adjective to describe someone who was a real plonker. And if you were 'stoned' then you were a notorious sinner from the pages of the Old Testament..*
- *A 'hard drive' was a fast trip to Christchurch and back, and ram had something to do with springtime on the farm!*
- *We were more concerned with losing our memory rather than the number of gigabytes it had.*
- *Before the CD and the MP3 we played the LP on the Hi-fi.*
- *I was bright and happy when I was 'gay' and I'm sure that 'Microsoft' had something to do with the quality of women's stockings.*

Today my cell-phone expects me to be bi-lingual – I have to stop and think when my daughter texts me.

Aah – the good old days when life was easier and everyone knew their place. When Vicars treated their Bishop with deference and respect for fear of being banished to Ross, South-Westland! The days when we said the Lord's Prayer in a version everyone could recite – actually the days when people could still recite any version of the Lord's Prayer....

So is that what this weekend's all about?

Is it simply an opportunity to look back with a bit of good, old-fashioned nostalgia?

Yes, of course that's part of it. But it's deeper than mere nostalgia. These are our roots; this is our foundation and the philosopher George Santayana once said that those who can't remember the past are condemned to repeat it....'

But actually it was the Mayor who started me thinking about what I might say this afternoon when he said last Thursday night that the bottom line for him – as Mayor – was that it's all about community.

Now I know I'm Anglican and so therefore I'm not prone to outbursts of emotion – but I wanted to jump up and down and shout for joy because it *is* all about community – and I had never picked Kerry as a theologian.

But just in case the Mayor thinks that he's come up with something brilliantly original I need to say that it might be brilliant but it ain't original. In fact we believe that community was God's idea – or to be even more radical – part of the very nature of God.

In the beginning of the Bible we read of a Creator God speaking forth Creation and in the next breath we read of the Spirit hovering over the waters. And then in the

beginning of John's Gospel we read that the Word (that is Jesus) was with God, and the Word was with God. He was with God in the beginning.

This is the foundation of our understanding of what we call the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the God who is three in one or, as someone once described it, a 'community of oneness.'

If that's not enough, we skip along a few more verses to the end of the first chapter to the creation of the first human being. God looks at this man he has just created and knows something's not right.

The man is alone.

So God creates a woman – a partner for the man because God is into community. It's who God is.

And this is what binds us together - our common commitment to community and in particular, this community.

For over 150 that is what has kept us together – city and church. (And I don't just mean the Anglican Church – I include all denominations here.) – The common desire to build genuine community here in this beautiful part of God's creation.

The history of this city is full of the names of men and women who, as an outworking of their faith were passionately involved in the life of this community.

People like John Wallis Barnicoat a member of the first Provincial Council of Nelson and Governor of Nelson College. Barnicoat House stands in memory of him. He was a deeply humble man – churchwarden and treasurer in the parish of Richmond. The Marsden family of Stoke, Thomas and his daughter Frances the most generous benefactors to both city and church. Kingsley – remembered on one of the plaques on the walls of this cathedral. He was so loved by the Maori people that they presented him with a mere – which I was told this morning has just been rediscovered in the Auckland Museum.

And over the years successive Bishops have thrown their lives not just into the Diocese but into this city. Even before there was a Diocese here, the Bishop of New Zealand – George Augustus Selwyn travelled down to Nelson. His second service here in this community was a sunrise service with the Maori people on Tuesday 23rd August 1842. The next day he got back on a boat and sailed over to Motueka, especially to pray for and baptise and Maori Chief who was very sick.

Before he left Nelson on the 8th September he established a hospital under the guidance of a local surgeon Dr Foorde Wilson and made plans for a school – particularly for Maori children.

The first Bishop – Edmund Hobhouse was appreciated more by the Maori people than he was by the Europeans here in Nelson who made his ministry pretty miserable. It was the Taiaha that was presented to him when he returned to

England in 1866 that was presented again at the beginning of this service and which will now remain in this Cathedral.

The second Bishop Andrew Burn Suter was a man with a huge vision and even bigger heart. He established the Bishopdale Theological College – the place where the first Maori Bishop in New Zealand, Frederick Bennett was trained and I acknowledge Bishop Bennett's whanau here today.

Bishop Suter took an active interest in every department of education in this new community; chairman of the education board, president of the harmonic society, president of the philosophical society. He started the debating club and the sketching club the foundation for what is now the Suter Gallery.

Our partnership with the city has been an integral part of these last 150 years and we are as committed to the life of this community as we have ever been.

But what is it that we are trying to build together? What does it mean to be community?

Is it simply an accident of geography; the fact that we just happen to live in the same area. I think, sadly that is the perception in the minds of so many. The growth of individualism has caused many to feel isolated from friends and from neighbours. For others individual freedom is a value high above any sense of interdependence and mutuality – the distinctives of true community. As city and church we've got a job on our hands to restore real community.

I'm a relative newcomer to this city and probably haven't earned the right to pass judgement, but over and over again I find myself intrigued at the apparent inability of this community to unite behind a vision.

And just before anyone reacts can I say that we are not much better within the church. If someone upsets us we go and join another church, or plant a new one.

So what are the values we need to build community?

Maybe the Golden Rule is a good starting point – you know, 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'

Good idea, but unfortunately it has had a modern metamorphosis into something that kind of says, 'do unto others – but do it first!'

So how about the great commandment of our Christian faith.

'Love the Lord your God with all you heart, with all your mind and with all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.'

What about this one?

Trouble is I hear people saying 'I will certainly love my neighbour, but that doesn't mean I have to *like* them....!'

I want to suggest that we can find the answer to this question about community in the eight values that Jesus gave us at the beginning of his Sermon on the Mount; values that we know as the Beatitudes. They might be deeply spiritual but they are profoundly practical and I believe they are foundational to the building of true community.

‘Blessed are the poor in Spirit.’

This refers to people who have come to the deep spiritual revelation that the world doesn’t revolve around them. People who have discovered its so much richer to trust in God and in one another.

‘Blessed are those who mourn.’

Seems a strange one this. But it refers to people who grieve over the violence and alienation and exploitation and brokenness within society today. Its only when our hearts ache that we are motivated to do something about it.

‘Blessed are the meek’

Actually could read, blessed are those who are humble. It’s the opposite of arrogance. An arrogant person builds themselves up – a humble person builds others up. And in the end, an arrogant person might be noticed, but the humble one will be remembered!

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.’

This is not just about justice – although that’s a part of it. This is about relationship – about getting our relationships right with one another and with God.

‘Blessed are the merciful’

Elton John once sang ‘sorry seems to be the hardest word.’ Forgiveness is not big these days but it is absolutely foundational to healthy community.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart.’

We’re pretty good at letting the world see what’s on the outside. We wear some pretty cool masks at time – but its what is on the inside that really motivates our thoughts and actions. True community starts with my being honest with myself.

‘Blessed are the Peacemakers’

This is far more than the absence of conflict. These are the people who seek real reconciliation – not just a cease-fire.

And finally 'Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteous.'
The most powerful people in the eyes of God who seek to live out these values no matter how much that are misunderstood, laughed at scorned or just simply ignored.

You know we fail so often to get it right in the church, but these are the values Christ has given us upon which we build our communities of faith and I simply want to suggest as Bishop, that they could be a pretty good foundation for our city.

But whatever, we are committed to the journey together and we deeply appreciate this opportunity to rejoice and to celebrate 150 years together.
Finish with a prayer attributed to St Francis.

'May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and to turn their pain in to joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.'