

inside LOOK



holym Trinity doncaster

HOLY TRINITY ANGLICAN
CHURCH

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AGM – ANNUAL ADDRESS 2009

It is a privilege and honour to deliver my 14th, and final, Annual Address as Vicar of Holy Trinity Doncaster.

Calling to HTD

I have thought recently, again, of how convinced I have been this has been God's calling to me to be at HTD. In late 1995, as I was finishing my Ph.D. on Deuteronomy in England, I began to be approached for various jobs. Some were academic positions (in Ridley, Oxford and Perth), some were pastoral positions (in Adelaide, Sydney and Tasmania). When I originally felt called to ministry, as a nineteen year old, I felt that God was leading me to serve a church in Melbourne. So none of those approaches seemed right, though I did wonder was God trying to tell me I ought to be elsewhere or in some other ministry.

However some time in very late 1995 two friends each told me they had put my name forward to the then vacant parish of Holy Trinity Doncaster. My initial thought was 'they will want someone with much more experience than I'. However over the next few days I felt a strong inner conviction, that is rare for me, that this was God's leading. The Bishop even rang my mother seeking to get me to come back early to Melbourne for an interview. But I couldn't return any earlier.

However the day after landing back in Melbourne, in a jetlagged stupor, and in my mother's unit, I met the three intimidating members of the incumbency committee: Arthur Cairncross, Ruth Plumb and Allan Thomas. I have no recollection of what I was asked, or what I answered. But the peace that this was God's leading remained. I gather that was the case for the Incumbency Committee to a degree because only a couple of days later I was verbally offered the parish by the Bishop.

I had heard (though he assures me it is an apocryphal story) that Arthur lay awake one night thinking 'what have we done?', in appointing someone so

young. Arthur, the sleepless nights can end now! I suspect I was not quite the youngest Vicar at HTD (Geoff Simondson may have been marginally younger); nor have I been the longest serving (Tom Morgan was three months longer), though this is by far the longest time I have ever spent in the one place and in the one role.

When I began as Vicar, I quickly had to learn several things. For the first time in my whole life, I was facing an indefinite future. At every point up until then, I was in a job or course for a fixed, short term. Now it was open-ended. I privately aimed to last eight years, thinking if I was here to celebrate the 150th anniversary, that would be good going. Even then, 2004 seemed a long way off. It was quite a change of mind-set to work on a long term ministry. When you are in a role for what you know to be a short time, and not in charge, many of the harder aspects of ministry get ignored. However I realised I needed to deal with the big issues and couldn't leave anything for someone else to deal with.

My induction, by Archbishop Rayner, was held on a miserably wet night. A friend commented after that there was lots of grey hair and few young people. While I think that tends to be typical of inductions anyway, it was true of HTD. The young adult group was closer to 30 years old than 20. In fact I reckon I could count on one hand the people regularly attending church aged 18-30. Now there are dozens, both English and Chinese. And the numbers in Sunday School were few indeed. Now they are much healthier, though there remains much to do and plenty of room for growth.

Regenerating a church is not an easy task and I am thankful to God for his mercy in working that here. Churches are closing in Melbourne all the time because older generations are resistant to change and regeneration. I remember we prayed deliberately and earnestly in the first 2-3 years for an

influx of young adults and young families, including committed Christians. And God answered our prayers. I claim no credit in this, other than in praying.

Not only for those ages, but generally, God in his love and mercy arrested the decline here and brought to faith, or back to church, many, many people. Some of you here today are in that category.

I am unapologetic for increasing the focus on the Bible and preaching. I have preached approximately 1100 times in services at HTD, not including weddings and funerals. Though some continue to complain at the length of sermons, I am convinced our growth, not only in numbers but in spiritual maturity, is due to people taking God's word seriously in shaping their lives.

Highlights

Many people have asked me what the highlights of my time at HTD have been. There are numerous. There are structural highlights, like new buildings and new congregations. I didn't come here expecting a building programme, let alone beginning a second one. Nor did I come here expecting to plant a Chinese congregation, let alone two of them! Summer Wednesday Bible talks, Trinity Sunday combined services, Carol Services, Thanksgiving Sunday prayers are all highlights. The 150th anniversary and the 150 Days of Prayer booklet were also clear memorable events. The sheer growth in numbers in church is also a highlight. The all-age service a few years ago when we realised we came from over thirty nations was a highlight.

But the vast bulk of the highlights, and what sustains me in ministry, are individuals. Ministry is about people, about people coming to faith, growing in faith, maturing in faith and ministry, dying in strong Christian hope. In the examples that follow, I will mention some individuals. That is risky, because some people may feel they or others ought to be included. But I take the risk deliberately because it is individuals who are the highlights.

I have conducted 202 funerals at HTD. In particular, taking funerals of faithful Christians is an astonishing privilege and a most moving experience. There are many in that category, such as Rob Crane, Jenny Chung, Jack Jones, Sue Horrocks, Bi Duan Lin, Georgie Serpell, Mildred Morris, and many others. Those testimonies to gospel victory are powerfully encouraging.

I have conducted 437 baptisms here, and seeing many people make a clear testimony of Christian faith is very powerful, not least when there is family opposition. I am also very excited when I see people whom I have baptised continue to grow in Christian faith and service such as Stuart Roffey, Katie Zhang, Rob and Sam Chu, John Deng, Dafang Xu, Alan Xue. It is a highlight, for example, when Fang Xie says of his baptism that it is like a new life starting, and less than two years later he is helping teach a Bible study group.

It is a highlight for me when the Caruna kids answer the questions in the children's talks with such amazing Bible knowledge. It is a highlight because Tony and Michelle came to faith through preparing Jessica for baptism, I also baptised Michelle and I see what a great work God has done in them and how well their children have been taught the Christian faith. Now Jessica is confirmed and Tony is studying at Ridley.

It is a highlight for me to see faithful individuals serving God as unsung heroes. To see the countless hours Ray McGahy poured into CEBS, Anne Olney's faithfulness organising morning tea every Sunday, John Lim's faithful support of David and Esther week in week out for nearly ten years, for Bill Milford's tireless work coordinating ESL, for Dorothy Bartholomeusz's leadership of Wednesdays at 2 for so many years, to see people like Jillian Davey and Drew Chan give up Sunday afternoons to teach Sunday School, for Andrew Ruan's amazing faithfulness in supporting the Chinese and bi-lingual ministries in so many practical ways. That list can go on and on and on.

It has been a highlight to see people head to ministry. From HTD, in my time here, David and Esther Ruan, Carol Elfeverson, Warwick Grant, Danny Saunders, Tim Johnson, Steve Brown, Timothy Lau, Theresa Lau, Jordan Hitchcock, Fiona Chia, Ben Wong and Ivy Wong (who have I missed?) have gone down the ordination path. And it is sheer delight that Dafang Xu, Michael Chau and Alan Xue are applying for ordination from our Chinese congregation. Many others are considering future ministry,

such as Connie Lau, Matt Scheffer, Katie Zhang, Deborah Lim and Matt Ooi. Several people have gone on short term mission service. Andrew and Helen have gone long term to the Middle East. It is also a great highlight to see Peter Michalke come to faith in 2002 and now, with Gwyneth, serving in Kununurra. It is always a highlight to see people obey God's call, at some cost, as the Lord of the harvest raises up labourers into the harvest.

It is a highlight to see the generosity of many individuals in giving for ministry, mission and social needs and to see acts of love and care, often at high cost of money and time, being exercised by many in HTD. I have been moved, time and again, when our church members have given sacrificially for a new ministry, for Bibles, for needy students in Asia, for homeless in Fitzroy, for new buildings and facilities, for overseas mission.

It is a highlight to see people strong in faith despite adversity. What a highlight to see individuals, whom I ought not name, persevering in Christian faith and joy despite the non-Christian hostility of their spouse, the mental illnesses or rebellion of their children or their own debilitating health struggles. Do not underestimate your encouragement to me, or others!

If I was to be ruthless and name just one highlight it is this. It encapsulates so much of HTD and remains one of my fondest memories and brought tears to my eyes at the time. At the end of our 150th Anniversary combined service, in 2004, with a wonderful celebration cake in church, Albert McGahy, a man of few words at best, as our longest, continuous member of HTD, gave succinct testimony that HTD is where he came to faith in Jesus and where his faith has been sustained throughout his life. Albert has been a dedicated servant of the gospel and hardworker at HTD all his life of over 80 years. And then he took and prayed for our youngest member at that time, Rachel Lin, who was one month old. This was especially moving as Rachel's parents, Tyrone and Lillian, were the first marriage from our Chinese congregation and both of them were baptised here. Tyrone has since served on Vestry.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 3 that ministry that matters builds on the foundation of Christ with materials that will not perish. He is referring to the gospel. He says, "the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done". And seeing the fruit of the gospel in individual lives is what thrills and sustains me in ministry. Thanks be to God

that there are so many, many examples of that work of God's gospel over these past thirteen and a half years.

Regrets

In that awful song, we are told that 'regrets, I've had a few, but then again too few to mention'. I have many regrets. I know I have failed in many ways. There has always been more I should have done or things I ought not have done. Perhaps that is inevitable in ministry. It was certainly compounded with the demands of being an Archdeacon for the past eight years.

I regret we are not stronger in our corporate prayer life. It saddens me so few attend monthly prayer meetings, the annual prayer vigil and other occasions of prayer. Some have said that the spiritual health of a church is measured by its prayer meetings. If true, that ought to give us some concern.

I also recognise that we struggle to be more effective evangelistically. We are not great at inviting non-Christians to church, or to evangelistic courses or events. We do not have a strong outreach into our community and our great doorknocking ministry in the past has now died out.

There have also been many sadnesses of people giving up the faith or drifting away from Jesus. Some of the 127 marriages I have conducted here have broken down, as have some within our congregation. I find each case heart-wrenchingly sad. I know something of how Paul felt when he wrote at the end of 2 Timothy of some who had abandoned the gospel.

If I were starting out again, I'd be more disciplined in mentoring younger leaders. I would seek to invest more time in group and Bible study leaders. I would seek to do more training for church members, in things like leadership, Bible study leading, Bible understanding, preaching.

Recently I was asked what one main thing I was unprepared for when I became Vicar. My answer to that was the demand of godly character. The hardest thing I find as a pastor is to be consistently godly in my words, speech, attitudes and actions. I have mentioned before that my former Rector in England gave me three words of advice when I became Vicar here. 'Love them all.' That is great advice, but so hard to fulfil. For the several times I have not acted with godly love, please accept my confession and apology.

The Future

Soon after I arrived in England, the same Rector I just mentioned retired. He said to me, 'I have been here twenty years and I have the church exactly as I want it.' He was a great and godly man. But I have always been uncomfortable with his words then. I am not leaving HTD exactly as I want it. I doubt I ever would, could or should! There is always more to do, short of Jesus' return.

The following are some key areas I believe we need to work on for the future. Some of these are identified in our Vision 2022 document which formed my Annual Address in 2007. I have already mentioned prayer and evangelism.

As we have become a more and more scattered church, coming from areas beyond Doncaster, we need to grapple more with what our church community looks like, as well as our ministry to our local community in Doncaster.

Clearly the work on the new building project remains an important, and to my mind absolutely essential, area of hard work for the next year. I am utterly convinced of its necessity and the need for our ongoing generosity.

There remains work in integrating church members. Many come to HTD for the preaching, and services. An area of my weakness, I believe, is in not working harder to draw those people in to service within HTD. As I said in Inside LOOK earlier this year, sermon sponging is not a model of mature Christianity.

There remains work to do to strengthen our overall children's ministry, on Sundays and midweek. Ruth's appointment is a wonderful step in the right direction. But it is not all for her to do.

We still have plans to start an outreach to Chinese people in Doncaster Secondary College.

We need to remain proactive in encouraging people to future ministry. While I believe we have a good track record in that in recent years, the harvest everywhere is lacking labourers. We ought to be, more and more, a sending church.

Thanks

I do not want to make a lengthy thank you speech on Sunday. The focus, then, rightly ought to be on God's word. However I do want to record some thanks tonight.

I am humbled when I consider the faithful legacy I inherited in this church. Earlier this year I wrote to Howard Dillon, one of my predecessors who was dying, and subsequently did die in August, from cancer. I remember saying in my letter how thankful to God I have been for his part in the legacy of a fine church and ministry which I inherited. He was a great servant of the gospel. As was Alan Hoskin, Tom Morgan, Jock Ryan and Geoff Simondson, my still-living predecessors since 1955. I also mention the late and great Leon Morris, for 25 years in retirement a member of this church and who made an important contribution in this church also.

The legacy I inherited is not simply of ordained ministry. Faithful lay ministry in dozens of areas had kept a gospel heart beating strongly here.

Without exception, over the past nearly fourteen years, I have been supported by an exceptional staff team. Hilary Roath, Sue Collier, Ruth Plumb, Warwick Grant, Phil Meulman, Ian Weickhardt, David Ruan, Esther Ruan, Carol Elfverson, Paul Dudley, Steve Brown, Melissa Brown, Rod McArdle, Ainslee Walker, Megan Curlis-Gibson, Tim Johnson, Lisa Pike, Wayne Schuller, Michelle Codrington, Matt Stevens, Ben Wong, Ivy Wong, Jonathan Smith, Carole Norman, Chris Bowditch, Ruth Newmarch. More than once have I heard people say of the staff at HTD that this is a dream team. It has been for years.

We have been well-served also by theological students on placement in many years. These include Andy Prideaux, Stephen Carnaby, Gavin Ward, Leroy Coote, Carol Elfverson, Brian Westaway, Danny Saunders, Tim Patrick, Rob Imberger. I am also very thankful to God for Linda Drake's gracious and efficient work and support in the office for nearly eleven years and Jenny Smith's dedicated work as Bookkeeper for several years.

As Archdeacon I often had to deal with parishes with awkward Vestries and internal disagreements. I have thanked God frequently that in every year, the Vestry and churchwardens here have been such godly, ministry-minded people. I shall not list every Vestry member but I do particularly thank God for those who have been churchwardens in my time here: Roger Jackman, Clyde Best, Allan Thomas, Judy Savage, Eric Smith, Andrew Reid, Christen Barras, Gillian Best, Annette Clarke, Geoff Goodson. They have provided loyal, faithful support and wisdom with generous hearts.

Just as importantly, for fourteen years you have all shown me extraordinary love and support, beyond anything I have earned or deserve. In that, you have modelled God's grace to me consistently. For countless words of encouragement, notes of thanks, acts of generosity, gifts, hospitality, for your forgiving and forbearing love, for your consistent prayers, I am deeply, deeply indebted to you and thankful to God.

Many ministers leave their ministries somewhat embittered, worn out, disenchanted or disillusioned. Others are just eager to move on. I carry none of that. I am tired in the ministry, because parish leadership is unrelenting. But I am not tired of the ministry. How can I be anything other than excited, even to my last days at HTD, when the glory of Jesus is manifest in so many lives.

It has been a great joy to be Vicar here and your pastor. I have learned and grown much. Vicars come and go, and I have every confidence for the future of HTD. It went well for nearly 140 years without me and will do so for many

more years to come, by God's grace. Certainly my grief at leaving is softened by your ongoing link through CMS with my future ministry. I look forward to visiting in September next year.

I have deliberately chosen to finish my ministry here preaching on Revelation 4-7. These thirteen and a half years are not about me. Nor even about you. They are not about buildings or groups or organizations. But they are about Jesus, the lamb who was slain to ransom us for God, a people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. As I have pleaded these last three Sundays, hold fast to Jesus until your dying breath. Never let your love for Jesus grow lukewarm or cold. Long for his return. 'When he comes our glorious king, all his ransomed home to bring, then anew this song we'll sing. 'Alleluia, what a Saviour!'

Paul Barker

6 November 2009



2010 SUMMER BIBLE EXPOSITIONS



HOPE FOR THE HELPLESS

Talks on 1 & 2 Samuel

by Andrew Reid, Lecturer in Old Testament & Hermeneutics, Ridley Melbourne Mission and Ministry College
and

Martin Pakula, Dean of Students & Old Testament Lecturer, Bible College of Victoria



8pm Wednesdays in January

Jan 6 1 Sam. 4: 1-22

Thus Far Has the Lord Helped Us [Martin Pakula]

Jan 13 1 Sam. 9:1-27

Looking for a Leader [Andrew Reid]

Jan 20 2 Sam. 7:1-29

David the Great: Consolidating King and Kingdom [Andrew Reid]

Jan 27 2 Sam. 11:1-27

Sex, Lies, but no Videotape [Andrew Reid]

These talks sit alongside Sunday sermons at 6pm:

Jan 3 1 Sam. 1:1-28

Hope for the Helpless [Martin Pakula]

Jan 10 1 Sam. 8: 1-22

Looking on the heart [Andrew Reid]

Jan 17 1 Sam. 30:1-13

David the Innocent: David's Rise and Saul's Demise [Andrew Reid]

Jan 24 2 Sam. 9:1-13

Cowards, Cripples, and Crooks [Andrew Reid]

Jan 31 2 Sam. 22:1-30

High Expectations and Harsh Reality: Daring to Hope [Andrew Reid]

For Holy Trinity's sermon catalogue and some sermons available to download, see the website.

106 Church Road, Doncaster
www.holytrinitydoncaster.org.au

Key Dates

Nov

15 Commitment Sunday
28-29 Men's Weekend Away

Dec

13 Mandarin Baptism Service
20 All Age Service (10am)
Chinese Carol Service
(1.30pm)
Carol Service 6pm

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"Family Matters" Equipping Faithful Christian Parents

"Family Matters" helps families at Holy Trinity revel in godly Christian marriage and parenting. Being a parent is exciting, challenging and hard work. Child minding is provided for the discussion forums. Dinner is always great together!

Sunday
December
6th

Families BBQ at the
Schuller's—after
10am Service (109
Church Rd, Don-

For more information speak to Wayne Schuller, 0400 800 309