



## **BISHOP GREG THOMPSON**

bishopgreg@newcastleanglican.org.au

***Adapted from the address given at Christchurch Cathedral on the occasion of the Installation of CEO Samaritans and Canon of the Cathedral 7th February 2016.***

How long did it take you to pass from your door this evening to enter this door of our Cathedral?

I recall the long trips from my door to churches in Arnhemland NT. A 4WD with food, water, folding bishop's chair, a mental map of a six hour road trip on the Stuart Hwy, Roper Hwy, dirt roads, creek crossings, sand patches, deep jarring holes a car could fall into, opening cattle gates that collapsed on opening which require bush craft to reassemble them and to arrive among a cluster of wrought iron houses constructed from an abandoned cattle station. After friendly greetings and assembling a small table with white cloth under a shade shelter, began the privileged role of gathering 20 Kriol speakers to have Holy Communion – a service they had not received for many months. The distance was 500 km from door to gate, but it was always as if I was in another country. The local Aboriginal people welcomed me without judgement from a Western city privileged life. Sometimes I think they were sad for me because I was away from my country and culture and had no idea of the landscape beyond roads. Sometimes they were worried that an outsider arriving could mean being

given sad or troubling news.

Their acceptance was shown by their capacity not simply to welcome me but to listen and respect me, and permit me to lead this significant ceremony of the gospel. They had known rejection by my culture but offered me a generous space in their world on common ground in a love for Christ and his message.

The journey into the doorway of our cathedral or our churches is more than the physical distance we must travel. We each must cross thresholds and enter doors of culture, history, memory and relationships. The question is are we truly engaged in opening doors of welcome to newcomers and learning as a community who follow Christ?

In Luke's gospel (Luke 4) Jesus' doorway into public ministry was initially one of acceptance but later turns hostile. Jesus has moved from the wilderness temptation to the frontier of the streets, synagogue and doorways of Nazareth to his hometown where he is challenged and ultimately rejected.

We read that Jesus enters the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath and reads the scroll from Isaiah 61. Jesus is recorded as doing the reading with great drama with a process lending itself to maximum solemnity both to the audience and the reader. Luke records that "the eyes of all were fixed on him". Jesus follows with the shortest sermon recorded – "Today the scripture

has been fulfilled in your hearing". The solemn "today" by Jesus emphasises that the agenda for his ministry has been provided by Isaiah.

We have had much to say in this Diocese about mission and we have sought to implement mission action plans that take us into our wider community and cultures. There are wonderful stories of this taking place, yet we truly struggle with the implication to our own culture if we wish to have "outsiders" come into our life.

Mission is always a two way engagement. Whereas colonisation seeks to dominate context, the mission of Christ is always about transforming us as the people of God through the practice of welcome for outsiders and the salvation that is offered to the whole community. We are all in the way of God's transformation if we are listening and responding to the call.

The shape and content of the good news of Jesus in Luke 4 included liberation or release; and recovery of sight (allusion to the "seeing" experience of people who released into the light of day after a long confinement in prison); and one of letting the oppressed go free – here Jesus does not draw from Isaiah 61 but draws in material from Isaiah 58: 5-6 "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free,

and to break every yoke?"

Such a transformation will confound the dominant ruling culture. Such transformation involves the power relationships shifting away from those in control to those who desire freedom, release, healing and those who know they have need. Indigenous people throughout Australia, homeless and harmed, boat people seeking sanctuary, survivors of abuse who have their day to speak their story – when attention focuses on the injustices done to the "outsider" and a pathway opens for help, dominant culture will react because the power shifts. Jesus' missional agenda in Luke 4 announces hope to the outsider and confronts those who hold power in society.

Martin Luther King Jr reflected on this cultural problem of his day;

"I have begun to realise how hard it is for a lot of people to think of living without someone to look down upon. It is not just that they will feel cheated out of someone to hate; it is that they will be compelled to look more closely at themselves, at what they don't like in themselves. My heart goes out to the redneck – they have little, if anything, and hate is a possession they can still call upon reliably and it works for them. I have less charity in my heart for the well-to-do and well educated people – for their snide comments, cleverly rationalised ones, for the way they mobilise their political and even moral justifications to suit their own purposes. No one calls them into account." From Philip Yancey *Soul Survivor*.

There is at present much talk about what is orthodox belief in our Anglican Communion. I have recently returned

from Kuala Lumpur and the Installation of the Primate of SE Asia the Most Rev Moon Hing. There is a call to be confessing Anglicans to the truth of our faith. The truth in Australia is that we need a call for repenting Anglicans. We need a deep conversion and a repentance of our arrogance and self-entitlement that we have the truth over against others – in overseas developing countries and in local marginal communities. We need to be set free by repenting of our control and power over that which we despise and fear. We need to be honest and repent of the shameful silence over hate language and rejection of LGBTI people, and over the lived consequences of historic abuse of children and the vulnerable in our care.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem. I believe Jesus weeps over our churches because of our blindness to the need on our doorstep and the need for our own salvation from the works of darkness.

In Luke 4 Jesus by including Isaiah 58 in this story fills out "release" to include justice and hospitality to the poor. "Release" occurs again and again in connection with customs enshrined in Israel's law. Leviticus 25 prescribed that Israel celebrate the 50th or Jubilee Year, as a year of release in which along with slavery, land alienated through hardship from a clan had to return to its original owners. This is the "year of acceptance". Jesus is saying that the heart of his liberation is freedom from sin, but such sin is more than personal impurity. The "release" in Luke's perspective is a pledge of a liberation that will encompass the totality of human life, including personal, communal and structural bondage.

While Jesus draws in new material he also leaves out words from Isaiah 61. Jesus leaves out from Isaiah 61 the threatening final proclamation – "the day of vengeance of our God." It is intentional. Jesus' ministry (later to be continued through the mission of the church filled with the Spirit) was not to be shaped by vengeance but by acceptance. Between now and the final day of judgement is the season of God's hospitality to all, which Jesus proclaims and enacts. It is a time for people to be accepted not judged. There is the summons for conversion and transformation, but before conversion there is acceptance, welcome, a hand held out to the afflicted, the trapped, the bound. It is the hospitality of God. Wherever Jesus will exercise his ministry, the "today" or "year" of God's acceptance prevails. The great question is, who will accept the acceptance and who will not? In Luke 4 the home town crowd is confronted by Jesus' message and so they seek to kill him.

In every organisation, church, family there is a doorway for every person who by the Spirit of God welcomes the stranger, the bound and the hurting into the community. Such doorways assist an environment of grace where people might find restoration and release in the name of Christ.

In this season of the Spirit may our life enter the deep conversion of the Spirit to release the burdened and find release. In Kriol language from the Roper Valley Northern Territory it is the *gudbinji* of God.

+ Greg