



Shadows and Horizons

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Walking along the beach front most days helps refresh my body, mind and perspective. I happened across a painter putting down in colour and lines the horizon in front of him and what he apprehends inwardly in this scenic space in front of the waves. There beside him sits his dog patiently observing his work. The light shines over his shoulder yet his shadow falls across the canvas too.

When we encounter the wonders of life and try to understand the waves of experience that come to us we sometimes struggle for words – both for the wonder and the fear inside us. The painter painting the waves reminds me of how we try to make sense of our experiences through art and music, along with the deeper ongoing work of reflection that we each do when we are facing new and sometimes demanding experiences like illness, grief, life transitions, new employment, conflict or new found love. His shadow like our shadow falls across the canvas of our vision. The shadow of our own character and life story either helps us to embrace the opportunity before us or causes us to retreat and resist the new experience.

I remember a miner driving for 800km to see me in Darwin when I was a parish priest. His lonely life was comforted by his loyal blue heeler. Yet on that morning his dog was bitten by a snake and died in his arms. His grief awakened loss and fear and he wanted to see a priest and be assured of the future for his pet. "Will he go to heaven?" this 40-year-old man asked of me with hands that were hardened, scarred and of the earth. I said all of creation is held in God's love. The painful day had brought him to a place of knowing his need for love and assurance about a future worth living into. A prayer with friendship on a difficult day was a step for him in reconciling the shadow and the light within him.

"When we encounter the wonders of life and try to understand the waves of experience that come to us we sometimes struggle for words – both for the wonder and the fear inside us."

The symbol of the tree used in the Diocesan theme *Facing the Past, Shaping a Healthy Future* provides us with an expression of both light and shadow within our community story.

The tree has shadow, has aspects not easily seen, affords protection from the heat of the day, and shelter for wild life. The tree grows into the light for its health and vitality and for its potential for life. Both shadow and light are part of our communities of faith, and they form part of our own story as a Diocese and the communities that are held within it. If we ignore the shadow we cannot understand the purpose of light. As we address our personal and corporate history the shadow

of the cross for forgiveness helps us to walk in the light of resurrection.

For more than two years I have been listening to many people and painting a picture of our life in the public and media speaking of both the light and the shadows of our life. This is uncomfortable or unnecessary for some while others hope for validation of

their experience within the church. The approach of the Royal Commission and the knowledge of a culture of abuse are part of a public examination and are pivotal for the renewal of our mission as the body of Christ to live and proclaim grace. The call to *Face the Past and Shape a Healthy Future* is the necessary deep reflection for us to learn and respond wisely and compassionately to those who have been harmed and to know where we stand about our history and about our future. Parishes have been asked to support the recent Synod motions of apology, redress and leadership. These are demonstrations of our commitment in being trustworthy communities with trustworthy leadership. It requires of us reflection on where we have come from and what we are about now so that we may pray and talk about these shadows and horizons together.

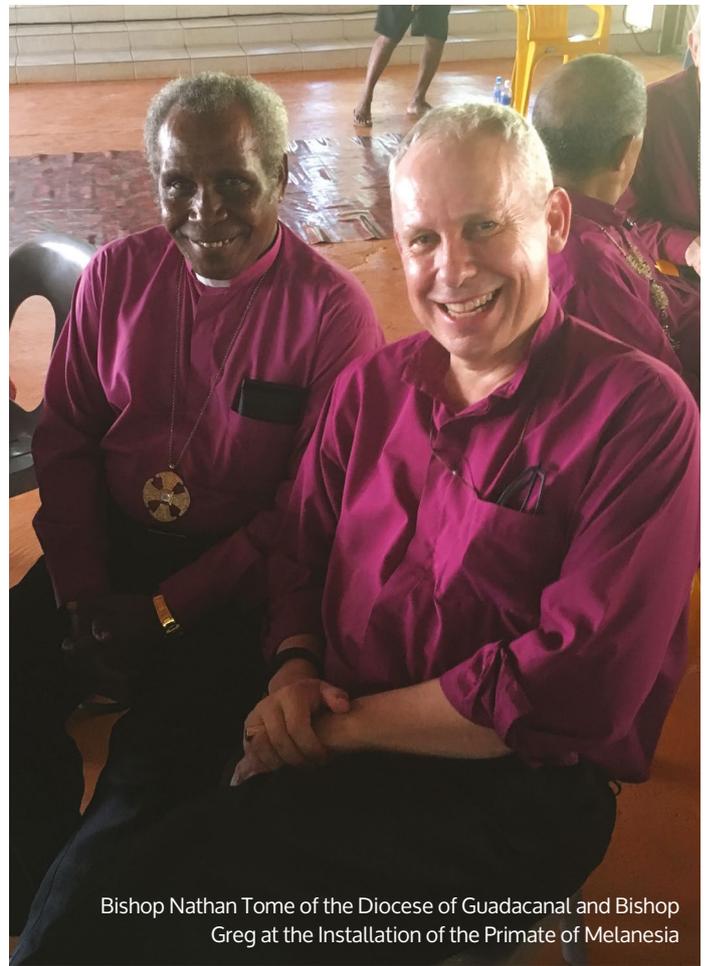


Facing the past Shaping a healthy future

Shadows and horizons are found side by side in the Bible. St Paul gives us a language for the struggle and the hope within each of us in the light of our experience, and in knowledge of the grace of God in Christ (*Romans 7-8*). Romans chapter 7 paints the internal struggle of our lives to be much less than what we wanted to be, captive and condemned by our sin and failures (*Romans 7:19-24*), while Romans 8 assures us of our liberty in Christ and of the hope of our salvation. Sometimes this is in prayer without words because only the Holy Spirit can pray through us in groans in our yearning for freedom (*Romans 8:22-23*). We live into the hope of Christ while wrestling with all the frailty and failure of our own making or of what has befallen us – this is the life of Christian people. Even with all these experiences St Paul assures us that nothing separates us from the love of God in Christ Jesus in all that we encounter (*Romans 8:37-39*).

Someone recently said that they uphold me in prayer. Yet when they do so it appears that more demanding challenges emerge for the Bishop of Newcastle. I thanked him and said keep praying because it is the Kingdom of God breaking into our lives – sometimes as a quiet revolution and on other occasions with disruptive shocks, however God holds us through it all.

It was a wonderful delight to sit down recently with Bishop Nathan Tome of the Diocese of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands recently on the occasion of the Installation of the new Primate of Melanesia, Archbishop George Takeli. Our churches have been companion dioceses since 2013 in covenant together across the waves of our very different environments. We seek to pray and support one another and visit one another, and through this covenant learn about mission, discipleship and the challenges we each face. We each lead in demanding times but we know that God meets us in our experiences and in our hearts as we must navigate through complex decision making in our cultures. It is hoped that in April 2017 30 young people from the Solomon Islands will visit us to share with us in our communities. Their singing, dancing and gospel dramas will be an inspiration but also



Bishop Nathan Tome of the Diocese of Guadalcanal and Bishop Greg at the Installation of the Primate of Melanesia

their lives of faith. I hope we will continue to paint the pictures of shared learning and understanding that we have in Christ together, both our shadows and our horizons. Young people can help us to shape a healthy future for our churches.

In this season we can affirm that we are not alone. We stand in grace and humility, we recognise and turn away from all that destroys and turn to Christ. We stand together knowing nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ.

In this season of Pentecost, may the Holy Spirit fill us so that we love mercy, act justly and walk humbly with God.

+Gregory