

Bishop's Installation Address

Threshold Luke 2:22-40 and Micah 6:8

On the occasion of the Installation at Christchurch Cathedral Newcastle 2 Feb 14

I stand in a place of great responsibility and opportunity – and still wondering how I came here.

I stand in this Cathedral that is a threshold between the sanctuary and the street.

I stand in a Diocese that is a threshold community saying “welcome, come let us share together in this season ahead.”

In this last year of being present at the marriages of my children who are here today with their partners James and Jess, Katherine and Rob, I can't help but think of today of crossing a threshold and bringing on this occasion something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue. The Old - carrying the elegant crosier of Bishop Tyrrell and wearing the mitre of Bishop Batty. The New – Mr Peter Guy's wonderful Mass setting composed for this service. And the Borrowed - the adoption of the Hunter Indigenous totem of the Eaglehawk on my Bishop's seal. And the Blue? – it's not under my robes to be later revealed. But in this Cathedral that overlooks the ocean and the Hunter river, the blue is the colour of life which we must look after as stewards of God's creation – the country of the Awabakal people and others for countless generations who cared and looked after this land. And it is the country of my great great grandfather arriving in Morpeth area 1829, great grandfather - a Wallsend colliery manager in the 1890's, grandfather - a Newcastle tram driver and my father Henry Evan Thompson, a railwayman here and in the Upper Hunter.

I stand in the country with the people who have walked with me. With family, friends and the companions who encouraged me in my faith and those who laughed and cried with me in the seasons and days that I have known.

I stand here today because of Indigenous Australians who have taught me about courage and faithfulness. I am so pleased that First Peoples of this country have welcomed me and with my sisters in Christ who I had the privilege to ordain – the Rev Colleen Mamarika from Umbakumba and Revd Yulki Nunggamajjbar from Numbulwar have been part of this ceremony.

I stand at a place of memory looking back.

I wish in particular to recognise the extraordinary Indigenous minister Revd James Noble First Aboriginal Anglican Deacon in Australia. From Queensland through the cattle industry he came to Scone as a young man. Encouraged by Christian men in the cattle industry he was Schooled, Baptised and mentored as an adult through Scone Anglican Church. He returned to Queensland at Yarrabah and then joining with his wife Angelina on the Anglican mission boat to Roper River in 1908 to establish a sanctuary in the times of the killings of Aboriginal peoples. On the wall of the Aboriginal Anglican Church St Matthews at Ngukurr is a traditional painting marking the gospel coming to the Roper River region by James and Angelina Noble. The gift of their ministry was to raise an Indigenous Arnhemland church seeded among others by people from this Diocese who opened their faith and hearts to James Noble.

I stand at this threshold looking forward, meeting new people and rediscovering the communities of Newcastle Diocese, familiar to me 35 years ago and now in a different era. I have much to learn and remember again. I have this doorway open and Kerry and I desire to walk prayerfully and gently with you as God has done with us over these 35 years since we have been away. We left in an old VW in 1979 and returned with a carload of life which we feel humbly privileged to share with you.

We read in the gospels how the first Christian communities recognised and remembered threshold moments and how God's plan emerged in fragile but expectant times. At this Installation we observe the Presentation of Christ in the Temple as recorded in Luke 2. The story of the child Jesus entering the Temple of his heavenly Father, in the loving arms of his earthly mother - a tender convergence of love between heaven and earth, the kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. The first Christian community recorded and remembered this significant moment to tell both of the wonder of Christ coming in prophetic fulfilment but also to remind the community to reshape its life from the old to the new age in Christ in which it now exists - to carry the light of Christ into all the world.

This Anglican Diocese is a threshold community with an extraordinary missional history and tradition. And it is facing a future unimagined by its 19th century pioneer ancestors

in the faith. At this service I carried the Bishop Tyrrell pastoral staff recognising the honour and the significant legacy of his leadership in whose steps I now walk. Without forgetting its history or identity, this generation will need to engage with contemporary methods and healthy relationships in the cities, towns, and neighbourhoods with the wonder of God's grace that gives hope and life. We along with the many faith traditions gathered in this service will work together as a community of communities to share the message that Christ died and rose again for all humanity - the ultimate threshold moment in history.

With Bishop Tyrrell and all the great cloud of witnesses who watch on, a question emerges for me of whether I will stand up for the task of proclaiming Christ in this generation and pass on the baton of faith to a new generation? Or will we simply resign to surviving off the legacy of the past?

In answering this question, our churches will not always be peaceful places. For we wrestle with the gap between what the Church is called to be and what it often resigns itself to being. Between being a citizen of the city on earth with our fears and anxieties and yet walking in hope as a pilgrim towards the City of God. We face challenges that seem much bigger than our resources, yet we have this deep call among us to live where the world's needs and our deepest joys meet – as Micah 6:8 says “to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God”.

In the Temple setting of Luke 2, Simeon waits to see God's kingdom come in his day... Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God...’ Reading in the Áwabakal language of the local First people, translated 1827-31 by Lancelot Threkeld and Birabin in Lake Macquarie area;

29 “Wamunbilla bi tia Yehoa yakita piyalkan,

Master now you are dismissing your servant in peace,

yanti wiya bi ba:

according to your word;

30 Kulla bang nakulla ngikung ko ngolomullikan ngirumba

For my eyes have seen your salvation,

31 Ngali ko kakilliko Ngintoa yantin ko kuri ko mikan tako

Which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 Kaibung kakilloko barun ethanekal ko,

A light for revelation to the Gentiles

ngatun pital kakilliko kuri ko Itharael ngirumba ko.”

And for glory to your people Israel. From the Gospel of Luke in Awabakal 1892

Like Simeon who witnessed a new era, we too are at the threshold of a new season not simply because you have a new pastoral leader but because we face extraordinary challenges in our day – social, political, economic, environmental, global and spiritual. Do we have the words to name and the eyes to see the Spirit of God at work in the world, in the grace of God in the communities we share in, in the sacrificial service of civic leaders and public servants, in the schools and universities that shape character with knowledge of our world, in the friendship of neighbours who work at differences, in the compassionate justice of agencies caring for the poor, in the churches who open their doors to the stranger, the condemned one, the different one, the searcher, the lonely? Will we have the eyes to see the presence of Christ who enters our ordered sanctuaries to call us to true engagement with the gospel?

A community on a threshold will not remain passive, a spectator on its environment. It will not forget its history or its foundation, or its sacramental life in worship. But with prayer will take risks to engage because the love of Christ compels it to.

It will see its past and its present worship reflect a deeper demanding call to do (as Micah called God’s people) – to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God”.

Justice misphat is not about revenge or retribution, or getting ones own way but making a way for people to have access to a community that says they have dignity, with the image of God within them, that they have a life to contribute and that there is a path for them to both give and receive from their community. Often coupled in the OT with the word righteous sedeqa – such righteousness is about the right relationships that make communities healthy and reveal the character of God’s justice to economic, social and even religious outsiders. Justice and righteousness is of God in a church or community when we see people sharing in the commonwealth and common good of a society, by contributing their gifts and being known and welcomed into that life by others. Retribution and bigotry is nurtured when our identity becomes so tribal, that we protect the powerful and builds walls that exclude the different or dispossessed. Jesus did justice in his ministry as he restored people spiritually, physically and into the community they had been shut out from. At its heart, threshold community is a restorative community building communities of hope.

My leadership has been inspired by such communities. By homeless people who made their home in the Church of St Johns Darlinghurst and contributed out of their birth right gifts to their community - and were named, remembered and loved. I met many Governor Generals and Jesus Christs at Darlinghurst, but I also met the mercy and loving kindness of people who made me their friends, who wanted my company and didn’t judge me for being a priest. I have been inspired by the people of St James Sanderson in Darwin who had the courage to befriend people in their community who had suffered violence and poverty, by the volunteers at St Johns Canberra who gave food to the poor in that city, and by the Indigenous Christians in remote bush communities who live such faithful lives even as they are confounded by violence, poverty and sadness around them – these and many more in the last 35 years have inspired me in being someone who desires to hear and share the call to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

Micah’s word is what I will remind this Anglican church of in the days ahead, and work with the city and civic leaders to see that this city is a child safe and friendly city and that our churches are the blessing of all communities through their words and actions.

The holy family in Luke 2 attend to the threshold of ritual and communal practices for a new season for the child Jesus as part of a community. We see in these simple acts, Jesus' life revealed in and through the institution of the Temple and culture of his day.

In the gospel accounts the life of Jesus is not so conditioned that the environment strangles his mission, identity and charisma. He is shaped by his village and religion but not bound by it often challenging them. While he is in his mother's arms, his destiny remains in God's hands. The Spirit is operative in and through the local history of observance, life giving or life binding aspects as all places have in them.

Even through all the cultural conditioning that we live with and the histories that we have inherited, matters often beyond our control, there remains the momentum of God in our lives. We do not have to remain angry or passive about our lives or feel captive by the hurts or the institutions so resilient at times to meeting the compelling needs of individuals or the wider community. The critical question to this generation is 'what will be our legacy that we leave the children and grandchildren of our communities?'

In Luke 2 under Roman occupation and religious hostility, Simeon waits for the Messiah. 'There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.' In the gospel we have a little picture of a person who stands ready at the threshold of a new season, in a liminal place between memory and anticipation. I will seek to nurture among us Simeon's character as we embark on a future together as a threshold community;

- the importance of integrity in leadership - Our Church will ensure a safe place for the vulnerable and for them to grow with us.
- the importance of faithfulness - The Church will proclaim a risen and crucified Christ to its communities and offer sustained care alongside those who struggle and bear burdens.
- the importance of the Holy Spirit - The Church will renew its life by nurturing the Spirit at its heart and recognising the Spirit at work in the wider community.

- the importance of vision and blessing - The Church will work with civic leaders and other faith leaders to bless communities and to seek to transform our environment with the work of the kingdom among us.

Will you pray for me as I pray for you to stand with Simeon, to recognise the times we are in and Christ in our midst.....and to have the courage and wisdom to walk this way together?

Bishop Greg Thompson