



CC-17 in Hong Kong **yesterday**.

First of all, may I thank His Grace the Archbishop for the invitation to preach in his cathedral, and Mr Dean the invitation to preach in his cathedral. It's an Anglican tension as to whose cathedral it is, but I'll leave you to fight that one out later.

Christian truth is not by our self-discovery, found in our lives and in our church and in our world, it's not found by our human wisdom, but through the gracious revelation of God. The reading from the book of Revelation begins with words like 'look' so that we may see, not that we may work it out. And the greatest act of revelation is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, celebrated today throughout the Orthodox world, as is usually the case, on a different Sunday to the dates of the Western Church.

Because of the resurrection, a physical and historical event, for no other explanation makes historical sense, disciples of Jesus then and now find their whole world view changed. A light falls on us that reveals the world to be different to everything we imagined. The resurrection illuminates the reality that this is God's world and God's church.

Resurrection always has been, from the earliest days including Thomas the apostle, unbelievable and a stumbling block for many people. It is not an idea that humans would have created. A made-up story would not have put God on a cross, nor Jesus rising from the dead. It is properly nonsense.

And so, it challenges all our presuppositions and prejudices about the world around us. They show themselves, our prejudices and presuppositions, as so often we humans start by creating our own concept of God. Normally, with the preface "the God I believe in..." and then we go on with our description. Gregory of Nyssa, one of the early Church theologians said this: "Concepts create idols, only wonder comprehends anything. People kill one another over idols, wonder makes us fall to our knees. If you form a concept of God, you make an idol of God. We understand by revelation."

We are disciples of Jesus Christ, the risen son of God. As such, we are part of God's Church, not the church we want God to create. That church would fit us much better. It would be much more comfortable, much less challenging, much easier.

The denominations of which we are a part, as Anglicans, and which many of us love, always give us the temptation of themselves becoming idols. The disciples, as we read in the Acts, did indeed fall on their knees. And we hear time and time again of them worshipping. We also, of course, hear of the reality that in worship they faced persecution.

In the case of the disciples they were given strict instructions by the high priest in the reading we had from the Acts of the Apostles, not to teach in the name of Jesus. Notice that the rulers use the phrase "in this name" and later on they say, "this man's blood". The name of Jesus is powerful. We read and sing songs of the powerful name of Jesus.

But listen to the courage of Peter and the disciples in verse 29. Peter and the other apostles replied, "we must obey God rather than human beings". And Jesus says in Luke 6:22 "Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man". Many here, like Peter, have had your faith tested under difficult circumstances. Some of you under circumstances nearly impossible.

Thank you for standing firm in your faith. Not only are you standing firm in your faith, you are also sharing your faith like Peter who took advantage of the situation of being challenged to share the good news about Jesus Christ. In verses 30-31 of Acts he says that "The God of our ancestors who raised Jesus from the dead whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as prince and saviour that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins".

Possibly not what a defence attorney might have said, but nevertheless, a clear witness to the truth of Jesus Christ. It is a wonderful summary of the good news of salvation offered to every human being. It is because of the good news that Peter, and his companions are witnesses of these things. You who are persecuted, must share your stories with us. So that the universal church may pray, and so that the world will know what you go through.

The U.S. State Department has, for many years, been an advocate of the protection of Christians. Recently, the British Foreign Secretary has formed a commission under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Truro, Bishop Philip Mountstephen who used to lead the Church Mission Society, to review and map levels of persecution and other forms of discrimination against Christians in key countries around the world.

Today, we know again, more and more about the persecution of Christians. In the last two weeks we have seen it's fresh reality. Terrorists attacked those they thought to be Christians, Christians and those who worked with and for Christians. They attacked the innocent, the helpless, those merely passing by in Colombo and other towns. They did so on Easter Day – the day of resurrection.

That paradox of death all around, of the hands of violence seemingly triumphing, is as old as the promise of Jesus when he says to his disciples "Peace be with you" and when the glorified Lord says, in Revelation, "Peace be with you".

A patriarch of the early church, St Chrysostom, comments that these words "give to them to counterbalance the war, the consolation". We are called to support all those torn apart by persecution, by civil disorder and by war.

Starting with the prayer for peace, and then ourselves seeking to be the answer to that prayer for peace because we receive peace with God and we receive much more than we can consume ourselves, so it should overflow to the world around us. God does not just pour a little peace into us; he turns a firehose of peace upon us.

At Lambeth Palace, the reconciliation team is developing a course for parishes on the subject of reconciliation, and how to be reconcilers. And it's being piloted at the moment, but it will be rolled out this September. In answer to that prayer.

Jesus gave his disciples peace, a peace that was beyond their understanding. As we gather for this ACC meeting, may our prayer always be that we will be filled with wonder and peace, and not descend to the level of creating concepts from behind the defensive barriers we so easily create of prejudice, and all those concepts which take on the form of idols. For in doing so, we lose peace, we abandon our sisters and brothers, we have nothing to which to witness.

Peter said that they were witnesses of the resurrection. And as a witness, he could not be silenced. The women at the tomb in the previous chapter of John's gospel would not be silenced despite the men, the disciples, failing to believe them, mocking them, telling them that they were

just women imagining things. Of course, our world has changed completely hasn't it? Sorry, that was a joke. Mary Magdalene was a witness of simple good news – “I have seen the Lord”.

Jesus gives his disciples peace; he reveals the new world of the resurrection. He has warned them of suffering, and then he says go. The Acts of the Apostles describes how they went, and the characteristic of going is to go and make disciples. Peace, suffering, disciples. They come together.

In many parts of the communion, it is normal to make disciples. It is a bad day when there are no new disciples. In others, it is rare, exceptional, even forgotten. For example, in England we found that in a survey last year, that only about a third of church going parents thought it important to pass on Christian faith, discipleship, to their children.

Two thirds thought it was a good thing to pass on moral teaching. One third thought it was a good thing to pass on the truth of Jesus Christ, the hope of resurrection, the knowledge of eternal life, the gift of peace and so forth.

And yet our families are our closest mission field. I had an example of that only yesterday from a family who live in what used to be my parish. Their parents became Christians after I left – the events may be connected. They may have believed in prayer at last. And then the children followed them on after they became Christians.

I heard yesterday they now have three grandchildren, the parents, who are being brought up to know and love the Lord Jesus Christ. Home witness to the peace of Christ matters.

And so, being intentional, deliberate, purposeful about discipleship as it is expressed in the Anglican five marks of mission, and the making of new disciples, has always stood at the heart of what it means to be a Christian, and therefore an Anglican. Discipleship is not an aspect of Christian living, a side line, a hobby...but it is the very core of life for every Christian and should, therefore, shape our whole life.

In my travel across the Communion, I have witnessed first-hand how provinces in the Anglican Communion have embarked on initiatives to equip the whole people of God to be intentional in their daily discipleship. In their families, at work, in business, in politics, during leisure and in all other aspects of life, and how that leads to new disciples.

In the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf they call this ‘Doing Good and Doing God’. In Kenya they speak of a ‘Wholesome Ministry for a Wholesome Nation’. In the Church of England, recently, catching up at least – give us time, we’ll get there – it is ‘Set God’s People Free’.

The former Primate of West Africa and the Archbishop of the Internal Province of Ghana, Archbishop Daniel Sarfo, has noted that this intentional discipleship is “God-sent in the Anglican Communion”. The Bishop of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands reported “there are few things that have been undertaken in our Diocese which have generated so much interest among the members”. This was after the Diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands had hosted a consultation on the subject with Canon John Kafwanka who is here today, as one of the facilitators.

Some provinces had adopted a Season of Intentional, of purposeful, Discipleship. While others are yet to awaken to the need for the centrality of

purposeful, or intentional Christian discipleship and disciple-making. I pray that all the provinces of the Anglican Communion embrace intentional discipleship in ways appropriate to their own contexts.

The fact that Jesus reveals himself to us, that we see who God is through the Jesus, the fact of revelation, changes our view of the world and our understanding of life. It transforms us so that we see the body of Christ, being part of that body that suffers in all its wonderful and beautiful diversity, cause us to be suffering bearers of peace amidst conflict that leads to witness.

Witness calls us to discipleship at home, at work, in every place and moment so that the body of Christ grows. And seeing growth, we become more confident, more open to God's Spirit, more gripped by revelation and the cycle repeats itself.

Such is the gift of God that calls us to unhindered rejoicing. Such is the gift that calls us if we disagree, yet, to love. To seek service, not power. To be visibly the body of Christ to our threatening, suffering and war-torn world. Visibly serving, visibly disagreeing well, visible witnesses to the hope that drives us to know that through his spirit, God is preparing healing for the creation, and hope for peace. And we, the Christians of this world, we are his agents to witness in that work. Amen.

10 min read

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