

In the name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Good evening Church!

We gather tonight and over the next two days as a Synod, a small part of the Body of Christ world wide. We gather in the name of the holy and undivided Trinity. We gather as disciples of Christ Jesus. And we gather to invoke the Holy Spirit to guide us and direct us in the paths of truth and righteousness.

We live in an age where the western, first-world denies the existence of absolute truth. But the church holds on to her belief in divine revelation. Thus we have confidence in the Gospel and the absolute truth of the love of God. It is this counter-cultural Christ-centred stance I wish to affirm tonight. Let us never be ashamed that we believe in the revelation of the Word made flesh; in the power of the Cross and the truth of the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. If we do not have confidence in the Gospel and its witness to God's revelation in the created order, then what, I ask you, are we doing here? As the Church we are nothing without the revelation of the Good News of God through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. We are disciples of Christ, marked by the sign of the Cross. We are the hands and feet, heart and voice of Jesus here and now.

We gather on this date deeply aware that four years ago the city of Christchurch was rocked by an earthquake that would write a new chapter in the history books about Christchurch and Canterbury as well as the academic understanding of seismic events. So we hold in prayer tonight all those whose lives were changed forever on 4 September 2010 and the subsequent earthquakes here and around the world. I think tonight of the people of Haiti and the \$140,000 this Diocese raised after their lives were devastated by their comparable sized quake. In Port-au-Prince, the capital city of Haiti, and environs a quarter of a million people died as a result of their quake. If we ever

need to be convinced that life is not an equal opportunity encounter, the story of the Canterbury and Haiti quakes is proof.

Recent days have introduced fear into the life of Ashburton with the murders at the WINZ office. Joan Clark, the local priest-in-charge explains that the residents of Ashburton use the words 'scary'; 'creepy' and 'unsafe' about their home town now. These are words that would not have crossed their minds prior to the shootings.

Then there continues the tale of the two Cathedrals. Not the Roman Catholic and Anglican Cathedrals, but the 'Transitional' and 'the Cathedral building in the Square'. This Transitional Cathedral is the only New Zealand building designed by a Prizker prize winning architect. It is functional and it was built quickly. It allows us, for the first time in four years, to gather as a Synod in our Cathedral. The Cathedral building in the Square is badly broken and full of pre-earthquake memories. While some people are still trying to achieve a restoration order, our attention is focused on getting regulatory permission to bring her down in a respectful slow manner. Our consultants report that no part of the old Cathedral building has structural integrity. The billboards showing photographs taken from a hovering helicopter suggest she is in good enough condition to repair. I too look pretty good when photographed from above at a distance. Maybe that's the photo of the bishop we should use from now on in *Anglican life*.

We are also challenged by earthquake-prone buildings. CPT is under pressure to get various inspections done. It's hard because, if we comply, there will be further delays with repairs. If we do not, we may be required to go back and strengthen repaired buildings.

However all this seems quite minor compared to the death of the first Dean of the Transitional Cathedral, our beloved Dean

Lynda Patterson. How we miss her and how we commend her to the nearer embrace of God in Christ. I ask your ongoing prayers for her family in Northern Ireland as well as the Cathedral family here.

So what do we say to all these tales of woe?

We say 'thank you'.

We say thank you simply because every time we are knocked back, we remember our need for God.

We say thank you because we recognise that even after losing so much, we have more than enough to share.

We say thank you because the challenge is always to live out of the abundance of God's goodness.

I say thank you because for every building damaged or destroyed, our communities of faith have grown in resilience and depth.

I say thank you for Lynda because her extraordinary giftedness is something I will never ever forget.

And there are other stories we celebrate and share with joy.

We are jubilant that the Lenten Study Book on Making Disciples by Peter Carrell and Lynda Patterson sold over 4,000 copies last year.

We also thank God for Christchurch Community Response (CCR) the inspiration of Church of the Saviour, Blockhouse Bay and St Christopher's Avonhead, and now a partnership of several churches. Their funding from the Ministry of Social Development and the NZ Red Cross has been extended to 30 June 2016, which is wonderful. CCR door knocks approximately 20,000 homes a year; and helps connect many people with agencies, community groups and each other. They help people who are flat on their back to get back on their feet. We also thank every parish who has offered a bowl of soup to someone who is exhausted or without hope.

We say thank you to every Anglican who has preached the Gospel in and out of season, and prayed with those who are hurting or have lost their way.

We thank those parishes who have stepped up and shared with extraordinary generosity their insurance settlement. St Mary's Merivale has committed \$1.5 million of what would have been their insurance allotment to assisting in making the Cathedral Trust whole

We give thanks for those parishes that are prepared to walk away from their buildings, land and independence in order to amalgamate with other parishes in the re-structuring of the Diocese. Thank you to those who have brought a resolution here to this Synod and to those who are still in conversation. Thank you; thank you; thank you.

Thank you to the staff of the Anglican Centre, the Diocese, CPT and Anglican Care.

Thank you yet again to the parish leadership of Upper Riccarton-Yaldhurst who are the world's best landlords.

Thank you to the Venerable Nick Mountfort who came back from Study Leave a month early to join the rest of the grieving Cathedral staff when Lynda died.

Thank you to each and all of you: to those who have just arrived in the Diocese and those who have known this place as home over many decades. Thank you for your discipleship in Jesus Christ.

But let's be honest, we are a bit tired. It has been relentless. And so in the year to come I want our focus simply to be gratitude in all things. As we switch from the season of recovery to the season of building it is going to be very easy to become jealous and resentful of one another. Thus to avoid this, I am convinced that we need to celebrate our confidence in the Gospel and remember that thanksgiving is the language of the memory of the people of God throughout

Scripture. Whether it is the song of praise found on the lips of Hannah and Mary; the joy of the disciples in the Acts of the Apostles; or the high priestly prayer of Jesus, in John 17,

there is a spirit of gratitude in Scripture that gives wings to our identity in Christ. We might say that profound gratitude is the point of difference for Christians living in a world of complaints. Let's decide to make it our point of difference!

Sometimes the Diocese acts as if we are exclusively a collection of parishes. But our ministry units include schools, two Universities, a military camp, a number of prisons and a hospital. There are the four divisions of Anglican Care plus our shared Social Justice unit. Every Anglican school campus across the city and beyond suffered extensive damage. St. Michael's Church School in the CBD could not have been in a worse location. They have had a difficult time and this week the news that their excellent Principal, Tony Kendrew, is leaving at year's end has not made life easier. Nevertheless, we give thanks as a heritage grant from the City Council will go almost the whole way to repairing the stone building on St Michael's Church School site. The Lord gives and The Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of The Lord. Christ's College, St Margaret's College, Cathedral Grammar School and Craighead Diocesan School each have had to re-build or new build much of their campus.

Internationally we all know the news coming out of Iraq is horrific. Let us remember that every religion including Christianity has engaged in blood shed and hatred of those who are different. Also let us remember the call of the Gospel to be people of peace. "Love one another as I have loved you" is the teaching of Jesus. And let us pray for the suffering and persecuted Church.

As to the situation at home with the upcoming 20 September elections: we are blessed to have freedom of speech. So please pray and then vote responsibly!

Another cause for thanksgiving was announced today by the Archbishop of Canterbury. A new religious community is being established at Lambeth Palace which will host a number of young people between the ages of 20 and 35 from all countries of the Communion for one year. Well done Archbishop Justin. I would love to think some of our young adults who are interested in fresh expressions and new monasticism might be among the first members of the Community of St Anselm; “a year in God’s time”.

General Synod met in early May 2014 and there will be a report from some of our members who attended the General Synod. I was immensely thankful for the Christchurch members; they were wonderful in how they came together to support each other and I believe they offered some inspiration to the larger gathering as well. This General Synod celebrated 200 years of the preaching of the Christian Gospel in Aotearoa New Zealand. Unfortunately four months on there is less talk about the proclamation of the Gospel in Aotearoa New Zealand 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and more concern about Motion 30, a General Synod resolution about same-gendered relationships. This resolution lead to the appointment of a group called The Way Forward. Its mandate is to find a process which honours and respects the divergent views within our church about same-gendered intimate relationships with a lifelong intention of fidelity. Jeremy Johnson, Moka Ritchie and I are all members of The Way Forward group. We ask your prayers.

Let me conclude by returning to the Strategic Plan. We can always find things to fight about. It only takes one person to start a fight. We can always find things to complain about. Life is not perfect. And there are always events and people for which we can give God thanks and praise. By God's mercy and grace and in the power of the Spirit I urge us to become a people of deep gratitude in a Diocese marked by a spirit of thanksgiving.

Let us pray:

*Gracious God, we gather in deep gratitude for all your hand has provided. As Jesus gave thanks to you, his Father, so we thank you for our creation, redemption and daily sanctification through the power of the Holy Spirit. As you have blessed us, may we give thanks and bless one another in the precious name of Jesus Christ. Amen.*