

Thursday 20th Sept 2018 St John's, East London 11 a.m.		10th anniversary of consecration and installation of Bishop Ebenezer Ntlali as 14th Bishop of Grahamstown
1 Cor 15:1-10	Ps 118:14-29	
		Luke 7:36-50
THANKSGIVING FOR THE GRACE OF GOD		

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain...” (1 Cor 15:10)

Greetings to Bishop Ebenezer, mama Noncedo, the Bishop’s mother, Ma kaRadebe; the Ntlali family; members of Chapter, members of Diocesan Council, our guilds represented here; honoured guests, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is indeed very good to be here, as we give thanks to God for this 10th anniversary of the consecration, instalment and enthronement of Bishop Ebenezer as the 14th Bishop of Grahamstown. And it is also our Cathedral Chancellor’s birthday!

CORINTHIAN LETTER

Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth...

Corinth was a large shipping and trading city... many languages and nations and cultures... a wide ethnic diversity... large and influential Jewish population...full citizens, free people (ex slaves) and slaves. This ethnic and social diversity was reflected in the church.

This was a church that Paul knew well; he had established it through his preaching and teaching ministry over some years. *As a church, it was a “contested space”- power struggles, groups seeking dominance or control, those who wanted to define the way things should be done.*

It was not a church without problems. There were disputes and sharp disagreements, moral issues, divisions and splits...doctrinal controversies...

And so Paul wrote, from Ephesus, to address the issues that had been brought to him.

His response: Jesus Christ at the centre

The church as the local Christian community

The church is important because it belongs to God, not to Paul

1 Cor 15 addresses the doctrine of the resurrection...as the centre of the Christian faith.

V 3 – the life, death and resurrection of Christ, his death on the cross for our sins... and his appearance after his resurrection to the apostles.

THE GRACE OF GOD

Then Paul writes of his own encounter with the risen Christ, his Damascus road experience:

v 8 “last of all, as to one untimely born [born abnormally] he appeared also to me”

V 9 “for I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God”

V 10 “but by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them – though it is not I, but the grace of God that is within me.”

Conscious of his own unworthiness to be in such company...as a former persecutor of the church

Paul's radical appreciation of God's grace is a constant theme in his letters. The grace of salvation; the grace of calling; the grace of equipping.

Grace is "the unearned favour of God"

Favour – approval, acceptance, regard; given from a superior to an inferior; shown towards undeserving and ungrateful human beings simply on account of our need.

God's grace is shown in the redemptive death of Christ...

... in the calling of believers

... and in the gifts of ministry.

"Indeed, the whole range of Christian life within the Church is derived from grace..."

We are who we are, as Christians, as believers, redeemed sinners, forgiven much so that we may love much... priests and bishops... by the grace of God.

THANKSGIVING – FOR THE GRACE OF GOD

We look back with gratitude...

In thanksgiving for +Ebenezer, for mama Noncedo, their family... all that has brought them and us to this place and time.... for the grace of God in their lives.

Ebenezer – "Stone of help" (1 Sam 7:12) "Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah, and named it Ebenezer; for he said, 'Thus far has the Lord helped us.'"

St Mark – the good news

These have been 10 good years. Our Bishop is no longer a “new boy” or a “baby bishop”. He is one of the senior Bishops of ACSA, with growing seniority on the bench of bishops.

We acknowledge and thank God for his particular passions and interest:

- family; marriage prep and counselling;
- The life and health of the church;
- Pastoral care;
- Teaching the faith of Christ

And for + E and Noncedo – the wonderful couple that they are.

We look around with appreciation:

Our diocese is a community of love and light, full of excitement. Parishes had wanted to be here, but we needed to limit numbers. Hopefully there can be further celebrations and thanksgivings at parish level, and possibly at next year’s Diocesan Family Day.

In all this, we look around with and see the grace of God

We look forward in hope and trust:

To the ongoing grace of God working in us and through us.

THE GOSPEL OF HOPE AND NEW LIFE – SIGNS OF GRACE

What are the signs of a grace-filled community?

A community to which people come and find forgiveness, grace, healing, new life, as we read in the gospel reading for today; a community that holds together diversity, a community where all feel that they are valued and belong.

A community that is Christ-centred, focused on Jesus who takes bread and wine – his own body and blood; who receives the prayers and tears of the woman, and speaks and offers forgiveness and healing.

A grace filled community is one where we are able to acknowledge our weakness before God and at times before one another.

A grace filled community is a real community: it knows the struggles of ministry, and of leadership. The church – the whole area of religion and culture in our country – is a highly contested space. The ministry of the bishop is at the heart of this contested space.

A community of grace is one where there is no complacency or dishonesty, or waste of resources. A grace filled community has integrity, and hears where people are hurting, and ministers there.

We need to ask ourselves why we attract some, and why some leave or walk away... the rejection of “institutional religion” in our post-Christian world; yet a world that is so spiritually needy and thirsty.

We need to return to a simplicity of life:

Thomas Berry: let us “return to a way of living in the world where we care more about life, love and people than we do about money, status, property and material things...”

CONCLUSION

We give thanks for the grace of God, and for our Bishop!

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