

Sunday 22nd October 2017 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		29th Sunday – Pentecost 20 - Year A DEDICATION & STEWARDSHIP MONTH
1 Chron 29:10-13	Ps	Romans 12:1-8
		Matthew 6:25-34
DEDICATING OUR WHOLE LIVES TO GOD		
By Dean Andrew Hunter		

“... do not be anxious about food and drink... clothes.... Set your mind on God’s kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well....do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself. Each day has troubles enough of its own.” (Matt 6:25, 33-34)

INTRODUCTION

We are moving towards the culmination of our month of Dedication and Stewardship.

1. PATRONAL FESTIVAL SUNDAY – NEXT WEEK

My sermon today has two parts to it.

Firstly, I want to say something about our Patronal Festival, next Sunday.

Secondly, I want to engage with the theme for today, “Dedicating our whole lives to God.”

Firstly, next Sunday, our Patronal Festival.

Our Patronal Festival next Sunday will have the theme of thanksgiving. It will be a time to celebrate and a time to give thanks. During the sermon time at both our morning services next week, there will be an “open mic”. Anyone who would like to, may come forward to give thanks to God for blessings received, or to give testimony to God’s goodness and grace. This has been a wonderful year for some, and a tough year for others. Yet God’s grace and presence has been with us, and it is important to take time to acknowledge this, and to say thank you.

What has been special in your life or mine, over these past months? Perhaps it is simply the blessing of this past year – that we have survived, that we are alive, a year older, hopefully a year wiser as well, thankful that we are surrounded by people who love and care for us.

Perhaps it is the birth of a child or grandchild. Or success and achievement with studies. I hope very much that this time next year I shall be thanking God for the completion of my degree! Perhaps your thankfulness is for your home, that you have a roof over your head; or that your family is together and happy and safe. Or that you have work.

Or perhaps your journey with Christ has been deeply significant this past year, and you want to acknowledge that. Perhaps you are thankful for the life of the Cathedral, and you wish to thank God for that. Perhaps there is a particular sign of God’s grace that you wish to share and speak of.

Let’s take time this week to think about what we would like to say, and be prepared to take courage and come forward!

Next Sunday is also the time when we are all asked to return our completed pledge forms for the year ahead, and to offer ourselves and our resources to God as an act of faith and love and trust.

1 Chronicles 29:10-13

...is a prayer of David. It comes in the history of Israel as David was handing over the crown to his son Solomon. With the crown David gave Solomon the charge and the commission to build the temple, the house of God. It was a costly operation.

David set the example and gave the lead. He said, "...because I delight in the house of my God, I have given my own private store of gold and silver for the house of my God..." (1 Chron 29:3).

Then David asked the people, "Who is willing to give with open hand to the Lord today?" (1 Chron 29:5). And the people responded willingly and with generosity. And then David prayed this prayer, which we use as we offer our gifts each Sunday:

"Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power, the glory, the splendour, and the majesty; for everything in heaven and on earth is yours... everything comes from you, and it is of your gifts that we give to you." (1 Chron 29:11, 14)

The building of the temple was possible because of the generous response of the people. In the same way, the life and ministry of the Cathedral depends on our response. As the prayer of David reminds us, everything we have received comes from the hand of God; we give to God from what we have received. Let's hold lightly to what we have received; and let's have open hands and hearts, ready and willing to give.

And now the second half of my sermon...

2. DEDICATING OUR WHOLE LIVES TO GOD

Matthew 6:25-34

... the invitation into a quite remarkable life of trust and hope and faith...

Part of the Sermon on the Mount, a great collection of teaching, presenting a new understanding of what it means to follow God.

Do not be anxious... look at the birds of the sky... the lilies of the field...do not ask anxiously what are we to eat? What are we to wear? ... your heavenly Father knows that you need these things...

The focus of the Christian life is to be God's kingdom and his righteousness, his justice, before all else: and all the rest will come to you as well.

These are deeply challenging words to hear, especially during our month of Dedication and Stewardship. We hear them, some of us, after a lifetime of faithful giving and support, living for God's kingdom. We hear them, some of us, in the midst of unemployment and shrinking resources and a struggling economy. We hear these words, some of us, as we face an empty bank balance and the needs of our children, our families, that we are unable to meet. We dread tomorrow and its demands, because we aren't really coping today.

We hear these words of Jesus in a world that is self-centred. Hard business decisions are taken with profit as the main motive, regardless of the cost to those who lose; dog eat dog, the law of the jungle, hatred and suspicion between management and workers, competition for resources, a SA society that is marked by its huge inequalities, some with much, many with little.

Yet also we hear these words, knowing and realising that God has been faithful, has cared for us, has met our needs, has provided for us, even when the cupboard was bare.

Our focus, our priority, is to be God's kingdom. God's will. As we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And then we pray, "Give us today our daily bread..." Daily needs, strength and courage for today. Grace for today. A day by day dependence on God. Living each day in faith and trust. Doing what we need to do – our work, our caring, engaging with matters, studying, doing homework, assignments, preparing for exams – but with an attitude and a heart that depends on God for the strength and grace that we need.

These words of Jesus do not come to us at an easy time. Every day seems to bring its challenges, its shocks. Life is very fragile. We do not know what tomorrow will bring. This past Friday, at the funeral of mama Florence Pswarayi's 27 year old grandson Kuda, the cry from one person was "Where are you, God? There is so much darkness... do you not care?" We are surrounded by death – the unexpected death of a loved one, the sudden loss of a job, the discovery that our beloved son is on drugs, or that our 15 year old daughter is pregnant... Life is very fragile.

And yet... "the hand that holds the flaming sword will not let you go." "All things work together for good, for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." (Rom 8)

Some of us may be going through times of utter darkness and despair... some of us have been there... and yet speaking personally and looking back to some of the hardest and most difficult experiences in my life... God opened a door. Brought grace and hope and new possibilities. It didn't happen immediately or easily. It means digging deep. But God's grace was there.

We do often think that because we are Christian, life should be simpler, straightforward, and that disaster should not strike us. But it doesn't work like that. In some ways, being a faithful disciple and follower of Christ exposes us to greater struggles, greater challenges. We are swimming against the current. We face the harsh realities of our lives not with despair but with faith and courage. We are called to be peacemakers, reconcilers, those who are ready to forgive, to reach out, to heal. We are called to love when everyone around us is full of hatred and fear and suspicion.

These words of Jesus are an invitation to rediscover a life of purpose and meaning. A life given to God's will, God's purposes. For the good of the kingdom.

To use another gospel image, Jesus calls us to take risks, to step out of the boat onto the stormy water, to go into danger, to face our fears, to be a sign of life and hope in the midst of death and disaster; to believe when others are filled with doubt and despair. To continue to hope. To continue to work for good. For the vision, the dream of God.

You and I are not faceless nobodies. We are children of God, sons and daughters of the living God, called by name: God knows you and me: you and I are of infinite worth and value to God. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father in heaven seeing it; fear not, you are worth far more than any sparrow. God knows you, loves you, cares for you.

3. COMMITMENT

A prayer of deeper commitment to Jesus Christ:

Recommitment Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, I want to know You in all Your fullness and glory. I've wandered away from You, and have become lukewarm in my walk of faith. I repent for not giving You total control of my life. Jesus, please fill me anew with Your love and peace that surpasses all understanding. Please renew my strength and faith and restore my hope, so that I may know You intimately. Lord, I declare You are my Hope and my Salvation, my Rock and Shelter, my Provider and my Healer, And I want to dwell in Your presence and love all the days of my life. Lord Jesus, I trust in Your love and believe in Your Word. Light the fire

of Your Holy Spirit again in me so that I may taste and see each day that You are good! I dedicate my life anew to You, my Lord and Saviour! AMEN.

Prayer of Commitment

Lord Jesus Christ,
I know that I have sinned and done things
that have hurt you and others.
I am willing to turn away
from what is wrong in my life.
I want to go where you lead in the future.
Thank you for dying on the cross
so that I might be forgiven.
Come into my life this day;
Come in as my Saviour and Lord;
Come to be with me for ever.
Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Please go to the Lady Chapel during Communion, for the opportunity to pray that prayer personally, for yourself, and receive the prayers of others, and anointing with holy oil.

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