

Sunday 31st January 2021 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		Epiphany 4 Farewell service
Deut 18:15-20	Psalm 111	Ephesians 3:14-21
		Mark 1:21-28
I WILL PRAISE THE LORD WITH MY WHOLE HEART		

THANKSGIVING

“O praise the Lord. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart: in the company of the upright and among the congregation” (Psalm 111:1).

In January 2007, when Bishop Thabo Makgoba invited Claire and me to visit Grahamstown with the view of appointing me as Dean, little did I know what was waiting for me. I had spent three years here in Grahamstown at what was then St Paul’s College (now the College of the Transfiguration), in the early 1980s. I knew very little of the Cathedral itself, except that it needed a Dean, and that the need was very great. I took a deep breath and agreed to come.

So, in January 2008, Andrew & Claire, with our darling daughters, little Rachel and even littler Nicola, arrived here in Grahamstown. The family supported my move – more or less - but it was not easy. There was no work here for Claire, and the promise of a job for her took 18 months to materialise. Rachel was going into Grade 7 and was not happy about leaving Cape Town and her friends. Nicola was going into Grade 5 and wept her way through our early days here. We have never forgotten our first Ash Wednesday service in Grahamstown. During the service,

Nicola turned to Claire and said, “I know what I am going to give up for Lent!” “And what will that be?” asked Claire. “Grahamstown!” said Nicola. But things did get better. We have a delightful picture of little Nicola as the boat girl on Palm Sunday, holding the incense, next to Rev Lunga as thurifer. The girls started school and made friends. Both Rachel and Nicola ended up being prefects in their matric years, with Nicola being deputy head girl at DSG. Claire was able to find ministry and was appointed to the Cathedral staff, initially part-time – until both girls had completed school - and then full-time, with student ministry and latterly Good Shepherd chaplaincy being a particular focus. And I began to understand the challenges and intricacies of this place. Now we look back over the past thirteen years with profound thanksgiving. It has been for me one of the greatest privileges of my life and ministry to serve here as Dean. We are so glad to have been here in Grahamstown – Makhanda – a good place to be; the centre of the known world; a place like no other. We leave with very mixed feelings: gratitude for our years here; sadness and tears as we say goodbye to you all; thankfulness for the special place that Grahamstown – Makhanda – has become for us, and always will be. We love you, and we shall never forget you. Thank you, Claire, Rachel and Nicola, for our adventure here together, and thank you for coming with me to Grahamstown. It would have been very lonely without you!

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THE SCRIPTURES...

In December last year, as I began to look at the scripture readings for this morning, I wondered what they might have to say to me, to us all, on this particular day. Would they be a springboard from which to look back, and to look forward?

As always, they intrigue us and disturb us.

Deuteronomy – “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet” (Deut 18:15).

God promises to his people a prophet like Moses, who will speak God’s word to the people. The OT has these recurring strands or themes of hope, pointing to the one who is to come. That prophet who is like Moses is to speak the words that God has commanded them to speak.

There are two aspects to this.

The first aspect is that there are those called by God and set apart by the church for the ministry of leading the people of God, and preaching. All who preach are called to speak that word of freedom and liberation and salvation – the word that stirs up and sets free and gives hope and light and life. School teachers and academics use words to instruct and inform. Former Presidents use words as tweets to spread fake news, to undermine, and to cause insurrection and riots. Priests and pastors use words to preach, to proclaim and to prophesy. The ministry of

preaching is for me probably the most terrifying, yet also the most exciting, the place of greatest vulnerability which I enter into with fear and trembling: to stand in the pulpit, week after week, and deliver ... what? not entertainment, not information, but the word that brings life, that disturbs, that provokes; the word that God has given for that day, that time, that moment. A prophet like Moses. We as human beings are profoundly stirred by what we hear others speak. As much as we are literate, as much as we read books or Facebook, it is the words we hear spoken that stir us and move us and raise us up. So when we listen to the spoken word, we are making ourselves vulnerable, we are opening ourselves to be moved into action and into resolve. Words can change lives.

And so it is the ministry of preaching that I have found the most challenging over these 13 years, but also the most exciting. It is a ministry that I share with others, clergy and laity, and it is a ministry that I hold in very high regard. In recent times we have seen the damage done to the witness of the church by false prophets and preachers, those who use the pulpit for their own gain, those who use their preaching and their role as spiritual leaders to manipulate others, to abuse and to control. The witness and integrity of the church is weakened by such people. Yet we press on with this exciting and dangerous ministry and calling: the calling to be a prophet like Moses. To speak the word of God.

The other aspect of this prophet like Moses, who God will raise up, is that it is a communal call. All of us by our baptism are called to be witnesses to the love and mystery

and wonder of God. All of us, by our baptism, are called to point people to Jesus. We are to be the word of life, the living word of God, to those around us. In our deeply flawed and damaged world, we point to Jesus as the one who comes to set us free from slavery and evil and death.

The picture of Jesus and his disciples that we are given in the gospels is of a group on the road, moving from place to place, healing, setting free, bringing hope, delivering from darkness and despair. Lives being transformed. It is a gospel picture that we embrace: the grace of God through Jesus that brings healing and new life. Speaking with authority. Speaking the word of life wherever they went. We are not on the road in quite the same way: as the Cathedral we are firmly part of a community, we are part of the local church, here in Makhanda; we are the sign of Christ here where we are; we are the salt that prevents this place from going bad; we are the leaven in the lump of dough that brings ferment and change; we are the lamp on the lampstand, the light on the hill, that shines in the darkness. It is here as the local church in this particular context that our witness is of greatest importance. Yet as the Cathedral, the mother church of the diocese and the seat of the Bishop, we are also connected to the wider Christian community; we are the place of belonging for people all over our diocese, all over southern Africa, all over the world; it is here that people come for ordinations, for great celebrations; the Cathedral is a powerful enduring symbol of teaching and worship and pastoral care to which others look up. So we are both the local community, the local parish church, and we are also a global institution. We are this small country cathedral, here in this small

town, rooted in the eastern Cape, yet with history and links that go way beyond this city; we are called to be a place of belonging and welcome to all who come, and a place of prophetic witness to the community and to the world.

George Washington Carver, an African-American scientist, said the following: “What you are is God's gift to you; what you make of yourself is your gift to God.”¹

What are God’s gifts to us, here in the Cathedral, here in Makhanda, here in the Eastern Cape? There is so much that I treasure about this place. So many gifts. I treasure and savour this small-town community; the networks that help us along; the relationships, the awareness of one another; our vibrant civil society that keeps our town going; I treasure the culture and music of this place – Kwantu, Pro Carmine, Masicule, Byrdsong, Rhodes University Chamber Choir, Saeculum Arium, all so wonderful and rich; I treasure our relationship with Rhodes University, its students and staff. I treasure our schools and GADRA matric school and the commitment to education here. I treasure our Christian life and witness that we share with our sister churches. I treasure the beauty of this place. I treasure the Karoo beetles – those little glimpses of wonder and beauty and giftedness that make this place so special; our tradition of prayer and parties, the gold I see in the calibre of those around me, the treasure in clay pots; the witness to justice that is part of what we are. I treasure the people of this place, each one of you, the living stones that are the fabric of the Cathedral; our wonderful clergy and

¹ American scientist; described as “the most prominent black scientist of the early 20th century” - Wikipedia.

lay leaders and volunteers; all who worship, week by week. Each one of you a sign of Christ. Our gift to God.

AND SO...FAREWELL

When I was about 5 years old, we as a family travelled by the Union Castle mail ship from Durban to Mossel Bay. The harbour in Mossel Bay was too shallow for the liner to dock, and so it anchored in the bay, a tug boat came out to meet it, and we were put into a large wicker basket and lowered onto the deck of the tug boat, which then took us into Mossel Bay. We waved goodbye to the ship with sadness as it sailed off.

Today we as a family are saying goodbye to you all. You are to sail off and we shall watch you with sadness. But we know you are in good hands, with Sub Dean Mzinzisi at the helm, together with Churchwardens and PCC, and all of you.

A word about our Director of Music.

Cameron Luke joined us in April 2019. He has been a brilliant organist and has brought many gifts and talents to the Cathedral and the choir. He has tutored our organ scholars and conducted our choir. We thank him for all that he has contributed to the life of the Cathedral. Towards the end of last year, PCC released him from the position of Director of Music and set him free to explore other options either here in Makhanda (Grahamstown) or elsewhere. We hope that he will continue to tutor the organ scholars and be available to play the organ.

We now have a brand new Director of Music, Kutlwano Kepadisa (Kepa), who we appointed this past week.

And as of today, we are also appointing Kepa as Cathedral Precentor – responsible for leading the singing in the Cathedral, and responsible for the musical life, the liturgies and the planning of the various services. Congratulations, Kepa!

There is no doubt that we are living in difficult times: the days of Zondo and Covid. People we know and love are sick or have died. Claire and I are leaving when so much is fragile and uncertain. There are times when it seems that the very soul of the church and also our nation is at stake; the potholes in our streets are a symbol of so much that has gone wrong.

Yet we endure. Yet we persevere. As much as we weep to leave here, we leave – and live - in hope, hope for you as the Cathedral and hope for each one of us.

CONCLUSION

“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20-21)

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Dean of Grahamstown
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