



# ACROSS THE DIVIDES: ENGAGING A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE WITH THE LOVE AND TRUTH OF JESUS

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## **Across the Divides: Engaging a World of Difference with the Love and Truth of Jesus**

*I acknowledge the triune God, the Creator of heaven and earth and His ownership of all things. (Psalm 24:1) I recognise that He gave stewardship of these lands upon which we meet to the First Nations Peoples of this country (Acts 17:26). In His sovereignty, He has allowed other people groups to migrate to these shores. We acknowledge the cultures of our First Nations Peoples and are thankful for the community that we share together now. We pay our respects to elders, both past and present, and those who are rising up to become leaders<sup>1</sup>.*

In delivering my first Presidential address as your Diocesan Bishop I am keenly aware of the responsibility and privilege of that position. Just under five months ago many of us gathered in St Saviour's Cathedral to hear God's word, to pray and to re-commit ourselves to God's mission in this time and place. Since that occasion Monica and I have been greatly blessed by your gracious welcome, your whole-hearted service, your prayers and your generous words and messages of encouragement. We are particularly in-debted to the diligence and competence of Bishop Trevor Edwards, first as Administrator during a time of transition and more recently as a colleague in ministry as Vicar-General. This will be the last Synod that Bishop Trevor spends with us prior to his retirement; I look forward to him exhorting us from the Scriptures at the Synod Eucharist tonight and then to acknowledging him and Ruth at our Synod dinner tomorrow night. Mr Trevor Ament, Ms Bev Forbes and the team at Anglican Diocesan Services and Bishop's Office have been a model of patience and calmness as they deal with the questions and foibles of a newbie Bishop. And of course, there are the thousands of sisters and brothers in Christ (all from different backgrounds) who give of their gifts in our Parishes and other ministry units, on our boards and committees and through our Schools, Anglicare, the AIDF and other Diocesan agencies. You truly are a blessing.

### *Beginning with the end*

Before I consider the opportunities and challenges we face in this present moment I want to begin with the end in mind. There are many striking passages in the book of Revelation but I have always been struck by this vision from Chapter Seven:

*<sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the*

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<sup>1</sup> Written by The Reverend Neville Naden, BCA Indigenous Ministry Officer

*Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> They cried out in a loud voice, saying,*

*“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

*<sup>11</sup> And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup> singing,*

*“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom  
and thanksgiving and honour  
and power and might  
be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”*

It is a vision of incredible diversity – people from all backgrounds, still displaying their God-given pluriformity. It is also a vision of profound unity – this numberless crowd is drawn together by their common worship of God and the Lamb. Finally, it is a vision that both re-assures and confronts. It re-assures the believers of its time – who were called to engage a globalising world not so unlike ours – that they serve this world’s true King. At the same time the vision confronts and challenges that world. Yes, there is a throne like the throne of Imperial Rome. Yet, the throne is also utterly unlike Rome’s, because the Lamb at its centre has won His victory, not by shedding the blood of others but by shedding his own.

With that vision in our hearts and mind, let’s turn to our world.

### *A World of Difference*

I have characterised our world as a world of difference, in at least two senses.

First, we are a world where we are increasingly aware that we differ *from* each other. As globalisation facilitates the movement of people, capital and ideas across boundaries it brings the diversity of human experience and worldviews to our neighbourhoods, workplaces and social media feeds. In that sense it creates a ‘virtual’ home where everyone and no-one feels they really belong.

Second, we are increasingly a world where we differ *with* each other. Sometimes alongside, sometimes in reaction to globalisation there is a re-assertion of the local and the particular. One writer characterises this as a clash between those whose identity is connected with

‘somewhere’ and those who are happy to belong ‘anywhere’<sup>2</sup>; in Australia Gabrielle Chan has explored how these dynamics go some way to explaining the city-rural divide<sup>3</sup>.

Allied to this is the much-noted rise in ‘tribalism’. For example, the US political scientist Jonathan Haidt writes as follows:

*Tribalism is our evolutionary endowment for banding together to prepare for inter-group conflict. When the tribal switch is activated, we bind ourselves more tightly to the group, we embrace and defend the group’s moral matrix and we stop thinking for ourselves. In tribal mode, we seem to go blind to arguments and information that challenge our team’s narrative<sup>4</sup>.*

Tribes have traditionally been held together by traditions – stories of their origins, stories of their heroes, stories of pivotal events passed down from one generation to another.

However in a world where we are constantly living in the present we risk becoming a collection of tribes without traditions. Here groups hold themselves together either by (i) trite and superficial appeals to identity and/or (ii) excluding and stigmatising the outsider. A classic example is when someone is rejected on the basis that they are ‘un-Australian’ without their accuser ever being clear on what ‘Australian-ness’ means.

At all levels of society this fosters a culture of division and mutual contempt, where members of different tribes re-inforce each other’s prejudices in social media echo chambers while talking at or about rather than with members of other tribes<sup>5</sup>.

### *Engaging our World*

In these circumstances it is understandable if Christians (and others) sometimes feel a pull towards retreat and isolationism. I am convinced such a move is both unnecessary and unfaithful. Yes, there is an important turn inwards as we intentionally connect with the tradition that gives us our unity and identity. That tradition is first of all the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, clothed in His Scriptures and present by His Spirit. Secondly it is the

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<sup>2</sup> David Goodhart *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics* (Penguin, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Gabrielle Chan *Rusted Off: Why Country Australia is Fed Up* (Random House, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> *Weekend Australian*, July 20-21 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Some of these dynamics are explored at [www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/great-untruth-end-democracy/](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/great-untruth-end-democracy/)

accumulated wisdom, practice and experience of those past and present who have walked this way with us and before us.

Secure in that centre we are then free to move outwards across the divides, engaging the world and inviting those we encounter to come to Christ themselves. In that sense I am commending an approach to Christian life and mission that combines fresh waterholes with low or few fences<sup>6</sup>.

In his book *Confident Pluralism: Surviving and Thriving through Deep Difference*<sup>7</sup> the US legal scholar John Inazu suggests three aspirations, or virtues, which can help Christians and others sustain the kind of robust yet respectful engagement so needed today. These aspirations are (i) tolerance – a willingness to accept genuine difference, including profound moral disagreement (ii) humility – an awareness that our beliefs and intuitions rest upon tradition-dependent values and (iii) patience – an awareness that dialogue and persuasion usually take time. I would add a fourth aspiration along the lines of transparency or integrity – that is a willingness to be open about our beliefs and commitments so they can be subject to scrutiny and challenge.

Beyond that, let me suggest three ways in which we can engage our world with the love and truth of Jesus. Each draws on a passage from Luke/Acts.

### *The Love and Truth of Jesus*

#### *. seeing what matters to God*

Here I draw on the story told by Jesus in Luke 10:25-37, what we call the parable of the Good Samaritan. A man lies besides the road in desperate need. Two men – both religious insiders – see enough to cross to the other side of the road and continue their journeys. A third man – a religious outsider – sees with Christlike compassion and is moved to interrupt his journey and meet his needs. In telling this story Jesus re-orientes our understanding of being a neighbour. No longer is it about choosing to be with the people we want to love; instead its

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<sup>6</sup> The image comes from a unsourced preacher's illustration. A farmer from overseas is visiting an outback grazier and is amazed at the size of their holdings. "How do you keep your sheep from wandering off? You must have to build lots of fences!" says the visitor. "No" says the grazier. "We don't worry about the fences. We just take care of the waterholes."

<sup>7</sup> University of Chicago Press, 2016.

loving the people we do not choose to be with. Seeing what matters to God means encountering the world's needs with an open-ness to mercy and compassion.

. *hearing what matters to God*

Here I draw on the encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. The passage models an approach to faith-sharing that begins with careful listening and proceeds through a shared journey around the story of Jesus revealed in Scripture. Hearing what matters to God means listening to the world's questions with an open-ness to conversation and witness.

. *feeling what matters to God*

Here I draw on the encounter between the Risen Jesus and the two disciples on the Emmaus Road recorded in Luke 24:13-35. After Jesus makes Himself known in the breaking of bread they recall how their hearts burned within them on the road as He opened the Scriptures, interpreting His ministry and their lives through the lens of suffering and glory. Feeling what matters to God means encountering Jesus in Scripture and the shared life of discipleship with an open-ness to recognition and transformation.

In 2020 I hope to implement this threefold pattern of see/hearing/feeling in a number of Episcopal missions. Working in partnership with ministry units and agencies I envisage a period of engagement that involves (i) meeting with members of the wider community to help us see the needs around them (ii) inviting members of the wider community from all backgrounds into a conversation about questions of faith (iii) welcoming members of the wider community to an experience of hospitality where they have an opportunity to meet Jesus.

*Underpinning Engagement: Priorities for Action*

Beyond and beneath these aspects of engagement there are a number of priority areas that will rightly occupy our attention as a Diocese during the next 12 months. The following are offered not as a fixed 'mission statement' but as a series of 'focus areas' to guide our discussions and deliberations across ministry units and agencies. You may note that they correspond somewhat to the six Marks of Mission as adopted by our Diocese in our *Governance of the Diocese Ordinance 2000*.

. *gracious and patient witness*

I am more than ever convinced that witness to Jesus must be our fundamental stance towards our world. A witness testifies to what they have seen and heard, confident in the power of that testimony to persuade over time. St Mark's National Theological Centre and the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture have a vital part to play in equipping us for this task and I look forward to the Diocese working with them to continue to shape a long-term shared vision for their work and the land on which it is based.

. *safe and sustainable ministry*

The implementation of recommendations and protocols arising from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse must remain at the forefront of our attention. One recommendation of the Royal Commission was that the Anglican Church of Australia and each Diocese should develop mandatory national standards to ensure that all people in religious and pastoral ministry undertake mandatory pastoral/professional supervision. The Reverend Dr Geoff Broughton from St Mark's has been engaged by the Anglican Church of Australia's Safe Ministry Commission to consult with Dioceses on the development of these standards and I expect a significant task for Bishop-in-Council and Synod in the next 12-18 months will be to respond to those standards, including allocating the necessary resources for them to be effectively implemented. Safe and sustainable ministry also requires the regular review of our structures and practices, particularly in less resourced areas, to ensure that individuals and groups are not being over-stretched in ways that are neither healthy nor effective.

. *compassionate and skilled service*

Since re-joining the Diocese I have been impressed by the variety of caring initiatives delivered through Anglicare and/Parishes and other ministry units. I am keen for us to expand the number of intentional partnerships between Anglicare and local churches and look forward to the appointment of a new Director of Mission for Anglicare as resources allow.

. *creative and informed advocacy*

One of the great strengths of our Church is the combination of focussed expertise and dispersed connections at the local level. Effective advocacy draws on both these dimensions to connect grand causes with the aspirations and experiences of local communities. Later in

this Synod we will consider two motions concerning the relationship between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians. The first encourages Parishes and ministry units to consider how they might strengthen relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; the second encourages engagement with the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart including its advocacy for a constitutionally enshrined Indigenous voice to Federal parliament. Wouldn't it be great if in taking time and making space to hear truth from Indigenous people at our local levels we might provide a model and generate momentum for a national conversation?

. *just and generous stewardship*

As we were reminded in our Acknowledgement of Country, stewardship recognises that God is the owner of all things. This understanding has profound implications for our treatment of creation. It is ours only on trust, and one day we will give an account for how we have handed it over to future generations. Stewardship also shapes the way in which we use money and property. In particular, the obligation to ensure that we make just redress to survivors of abuse by church workers remains absolutely central to our mission and of vital public interest.

. *inspiring and empowered worship*

We are refreshed for the journey as we encounter Jesus anew in praise and prayer, word and sacrament in our diverse ministry units. I wish once again to express my gratitude to Dean Phillip Saunders and the team at the Cathedral for serving us so well at the Consecration in April, in our Synod and on other occasions. Later tonight you will hear some of the work that has been recently completed so the Cathedral continues to be a place where people can experience the living memory of Jesus, as well as an indication of the work that is still to be done.

*Issues of engagement*

. *religious freedom*

The issues of religious freedom and freedom of speech continue to be a matter of discussion and debate throughout Australia. Without commenting on every point of controversy let me suggest some signposts.



First, I have already alluded to the social good in allowing a diversity of groups, religious and not, the freedom to engage, express and promulgate their foundational traditions and their particular vision of human flourishing. I affirm Rowan Williams' vision of a *procedural secularism* – where diverse traditions engage in the public sphere, with the state as a neutral mediator – over against a *programmatically secularism* - where the state seeks to confine such traditions to the private sphere<sup>8</sup>.

Second, we need to recognise that the flip-side of free speech is responsible speech. Christians of all people should be aware of the capacity of ill-spoken words to wound and to harm. Of course, we may disagree over what constitutes an ill spoken word. We may differ on the extent to which we expect the state and the courts to make this judgement. But none of us can escape our accountability before the One to whom all hearts are open and from whom no secrets are hidden.

Third, in my charge I have advocated a vision for our engagement with the world that combines fresh waterholes at the centre with low or no fences at the edges. This is particularly the case for our Schools and Anglicare, where we have wonderful opportunities to welcome students, staff, employees and volunteers from many backgrounds, to work, study and serve alongside them so they may in their own time and own way come to know something of the Lord at the heart of our common life. I do recognise that other religious bodies and organisations may choose to do things differently and I am wary of supporting a particular legislative agenda purely on the basis it suits 'us' but not 'them'.

. *wider church matters*

It has been announced that the Anglican Church of Australia's General Synod will meet in a Special Session in May next year to pass legislation arising from the recommendations Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Immediately following that session General Synod representatives will convene in conference mode to consider issues relating to same sex marriage and the recognition of same sex relationships. This is the first time General Synod has met following the plebiscite and subsequent amendments to the Marriage Act which opened marriage to same sex couples. To inform that discussion the Doctrine Commission has published a series of essays, including one by Bishop Stephen

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<sup>8</sup> See Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Sphere* (Bloomsbury 2012), p27ff.

Pickard, on *Marriage, Same-sex Marriage and the Anglican Church of Australia*. Free PDF downloads of that book are available at [www.anglican.org.au/our-work/doctrine-theology](http://www.anglican.org.au/our-work/doctrine-theology).

As many of you will know from answers I provided during the Episcopal Election process I am convinced that the Anglican Church of Australia's teaching that marriage is a lifelong partnership uniting a woman and a man in heart, mind and body is a faithful expression of the tradition we have received from Christ in the Scriptures and that any liturgical or pastoral practice should reflect rather than depart from this understanding. I do hope that our Church is able to have a thorough, informed and open conversation about these issues at the national level and that there is a willingness to make appropriate decisions.

I know this is a deeply personal matter and that we have a diversity of views and experiences across our Diocese and in this room; I pray that in being transparent about my own convictions I will be humble and patient in hearing yours.

*Thank you and conclusion*

This is the final Synod in this session and so will be the last time some of us gather in this forum. Only some of you know who you are! Without minimising the contribution of any one member of Synod, I do wish to acknowledge the particular ministry of Dr Beth Heyde. Over many years Beth has been a generous servant of the Diocese and its Synod through her involvement in and advocacy for numerous aspects of our mission including environmental stewardship, Diocesan schools and theological education. Thank you Beth and thank you everyone whose unique contribution has gone un-mentioned but not un-noticed. On a personal note, thank you to Monica and our sons Andrew and Matthew. You have been a great blessing and encouragement in this time of change that has impacted you all.

I told a colleague that in preparing this charge I found my inner perfectionist doing battle with my inner realist. My inner perfectionist tells me the solution to the challenges I have outlined lies in crafting the perfect address or developing the perfect strategy or appointing the perfect clergy or ..... But my inner realist (or more likely, the Holy Spirit) draws me back to Revelation. There we read that these early witnesses overcame not by any perfection of their own, but "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death."<sup>9</sup> As always, the way forward for us is to follow in the

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<sup>9</sup> Revelation 12:11

footsteps of Jesus, where winning sometimes looks like losing and life sometimes looks like dying. I look forward to walking in the footsteps of Jesus with you.

In the Name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN