

Sermon

'To Make the Word of God Fully Known'

Mission Sunday 2019ⁱ, Colossians 1.24-29



'The risen Christ appearing to Mary Magdalen', Buckingham Palace London, Rembrandt.

The vision statement of the Anglican Church in Melbourne is 'To make the Word of God fully known'. As Paul tells us in his letter to the Colossians, Jesus Christ is

*before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church ... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross ... I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel. I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. I became its servant ... **to make the word of God fully known**, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*

—Colossians 1.24–29

Jesus Christ is the Word of God. Having lived and died in humble obedience to God, whom he called 'Father', he was resurrected from the dead and exalted into heaven. By this he was revealed as the eternal Son of God. In Jesus Christ, we encounter the truth of both God and humanity. This truth that brings liberation. In the words of Jesus—which are also the motto of the Anglican communion—'You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free'.

'God is love ... In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins'. On the cross, Jesus' mission to reconcile the world to God is fulfilled. 'It is finished!' he proclaimed, just before breathing his last.

The Word of God, is a message of liberation, reconciliation and hope. Liberated from the power of sin, we are reconciled to God. We participate in the eternal life of God himself. A participation, through the Spirit, in the personal, intimate, liberating relationship of sonship

that Jesus in eternity enjoys with the Father. We are drawn into the eternal, abundant life of the Triune God—one God, in three persons, whose unity is grounded in self-distinction.

The Word of God, Jesus is the revelation of God the Holy Trinity. The Spirit that binds the persons of the Trinity together in a bond of love is also the 'breath' of God, binding and sustaining the whole physical universe. And it is this same Spirit that binds and sustains the whole Christian church in eternal life, allowing us to participate in Jesus' own prayer to the Father, which we have read in our Gospel this morning: 'Our Father in heaven'.

Jesus Christ reveals the truth about humankind, too. Created in the image of God, for the worship and service of God alone, the human race, under the cosmic influence of temptation, has turned from its true identity, purpose and destiny. Humankind has sought to be God. In so doing, all have fallen short of the glory of God. We live in a fallen world. Having severed itself from its own roots in the Word of God, the world of modern secular culture has become a culture of alienation: from God, from itself, from one another. It has become a place in need of reconciliation: first with God, and only then, on this basis, with itself and with other people.

Having been reconciled to God, through the once for all act of God on the cross, the Christian church is now called to the ministry of reconciliation in the world. According to the Apostolic testimony:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

—2 Corinthians 5:18–20

It is the ministry and mission of Christ himself in which the church participates. As Jesus said, 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you' (John 20:21).

The Christian church is the light of the world, a true witness to the Word of God. To the new creation begun within its own liturgical life. A liturgical life that is a reminder to every

human society of its own need for relationship with God. The relationship with God that alone leads to human destiny. In the future of the kingdom of God. In the liturgical life of the church—especially in the celebration of baptism and Eucharist, and because of the actual presence of Christ himself as host—the church is a sign and instrument of this future of God. In its liturgical life the church leaves room in human hearts and social life for hope of the future of God, and it mediates to the individual the assurance of future salvation.

By living out the righteous will of God within its own common life, the Christian church is the light of the world, the new humanity that God calls it to be. By living out the unity of a new humanity, in a new ecumenical spirit, beyond denominational antagonism, the Christian church is a true witness to the Word of God. Only then, could modern western secular society, including Australia, one day return to Christianity, as the one sure ground of the common life of society.

Jesus Christ is the Word of God. In him, we discover our true human nature: our true destiny, our true dignity, our true freedom. The Church preserves and proclaims the truth – about God, about humanity – the truth that sets us free - by maintaining its own independence from the powers – the political order - of this world. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, ‘For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery’.

ⁱ A new initiative of the Dandenong Archdeaconry. In future years, this will involve a pulpit exchange with another parish within the Bayside deanery to share lessons learned in mission.