



Rev Helen Jacobi
Bigger Barns, Higher Walls
Year C Ordinary Sunday 14
Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-25
Luke 12:13-21
31 July 2022

“We will not quickly be forgiven if this is another gathering that focuses on ourselves.”¹

Wise words from the Archbishop of Canterbury in his first keynote address to the Lambeth Conference on Friday evening. The Lambeth Conference is a gathering of all the bishops of the Anglican Communion which happens every 10 years. 14 years in this case because of the pandemic. There are close to 900 bishops in our Communion from 165 countries. 600 or so are currently in Canterbury at the Conference, including our own bishops from Aotearoa, NZ and Polynesia.

Spouses are also invited which might seem a bit old fashioned but in many parts of the Communion, such as Africa, the spouses of bishops are key leaders in the church as well. Only this conference is the first where there are a handful of bishops who have same sex spouses. Those spouses were not invited. Yet with incredible grace these bishops have still attended, modelling an ability to look beyond their personal circumstances in the hope of bringing change to our worldwide church.

The most conservative provinces of the Communion – Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda – have chosen not to attend citing of course the “issue” of same sex marriage but also that the conference is going to be focussing on “peripheral matters about the environment and the difficulties experienced by disadvantaged communities.”²

Nonetheless there was great hope for this conference. It is a veritable United Nations – you can imagine how enriching it would be to be meeting and listening to people from places you have never heard of let alone been to. A bishop from

¹ <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/speeches/archbishop-canterbury-gives-first-keynote-address-lambeth-conference>

² <https://anglican.ink/2022/05/06/primates-of-nigeria-rwanda-and-uganda-respond-to-march-2022-primates-communiqué/>

the Solomon Islands can be in a bible study group with a bishop from the Sudan or South Carolina or Saskatoon or Santiago or Sabah or Sambalpur.

A couple of days ahead of the Conference some material was released that the bishops were to confer on and ,unbeknownst seemingly to everyone, a proposal was inserted to reaffirm the view of the Communion that marriage is only permissible between a man and a woman. Now that was really never the view of the whole Communion and certainly is not now.

After a bit of an uproar a new clause was published

*Many Provinces continue to affirm that same gender marriage is not permissible. Lambeth Resolution I.10 (1998) states that the "legitimizing or blessing of same sex unions" cannot be advised. Other Provinces have blessed and welcomed same sex union/marriage after careful theological reflection and a process of reception. As Bishops we remain committed to listening and walking together to the maximum possible degree, despite our deep disagreement on these issues.*³

A statement which accurately describes the status quo.

Progress seemed to have been made to allow the conference to get on with its work, including important sessions on climate change, slavery and other vital matters affecting our world.

But then also on Friday a group called the "Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches" declared that at the eucharist today in Canterbury Cathedral they will not receive communion alongside "gay partnered bishops".⁴

This is utterly heart-breaking. To think that anyone (but especially bishops) would use the eucharist as a weapon or a threat is disgraceful.

Picture for a minute the soaring arches of Canterbury Cathedral, a place of pilgrimage over centuries; processions; choirs; liturgy very well done; and today hundreds of robed bishops, filing up to receive communion; what a highlight of the conference that would be.

Now everyone will be watching to see who is missing and who stays in their seats.

Imagine if we changed our invitation to communion to say only those we judge to be right with God may come. None of us would be able to receive. Because we cannot judge our sister or brother and declare who is worthy. All are invited.

I will be intrigued to watch the service and to see what the preacher does with today's reading.

"Vanity, vanity, all is vanity"

Some very honest words from the writer of Ecclesiastes.

This is not "everything will be alright because God loves you"; this is "life sucks and I don't feel good about it."

³ <http://inchatatime.blogspot.com/2022/07/canterbury-inches-toward-making.html>

⁴ https://www.thegsfa.org/_files/ugd/6e992c_7488dbb829e749a48d53bc70d90b8a76.pdf

Then the parable from the gospel. A rich landowner has a bumper crop – what to do with this crop? The landowner says “I” and “me” all the time – what shall I do with my crops; I will pull down **my** barns and build bigger ones to store **my** grain. Nothing about the community of workers who have delivered the harvest. I will build bigger churches with higher walls and only let in those I deem to be suitable. Except God says – this very night your life is being demanded of you – the same phrase you would use for a loan being recalled from the bank – your life is being demanded of you – and what use then is your bigger barn or church with its high walls?

The Archbishop of Canterbury also spoke on Friday about the dangers of the rich of the world controlling technology to the exclusion of the poor. “A world of privileged fortresses of comfort cannot exist in stability with a world of want and suffering. It is not the way of the Kingdom of God.”⁵

Think about this in the context climate change; those who have stored up treasure for themselves in terms of the energy and carbon they have used up rather than thinking about the needs of the planet. There have been stories recently of mothballed coal driven electricity plants being recommissioned to help with the demand for energy, rather than lowering the demand. That is building bigger barns.

Jesus says instead of storing up treasures for yourselves be rich toward God. “Rich toward God” – what does that mean?

Think for a moment of the readings from the last few Sundays and we will find that we have been given some clues about being rich towards God.

3 Sundays ago the reading was the Good Samaritan – compassion and care for our neighbour, especially our neighbour who is very different from us.

Two Sundays ago – the story of Mary and Martha – Martha you are distracted by many things (many possessions?)– Mary has chosen to listen – listening; Last Sunday Jesus taught his disciples to pray and to trust in God in prayer.

Luke has lined up all these passages to give us some clues when we get to this challenging parable.

So being rich towards God involves: compassion and care for neighbour; listening to God and each other; prayer; not being ruled by our possessions.

These are the things that store up for us “treasure in heaven”, or bring us close to God. If the landowner had thought about these things he might *not* have built bigger barns but instead found ways to share his crop with his neighbours;

⁵ <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/speeches/archbishop-canterbury-gives-first-keynote-address-lambeth-conference>

listened to the prophets; prayed about his actions (instead of having a dialogue with himself – I will say to my soul); and not finished life wedded to his possessions.

The altar cross that we have rededicated today – while being a treasure – represents people who nearly 100 years ago were rich towards God, thankful for healing and a sense of closeness to God they had never felt before. They had compassion and care for neighbour as they accompanied each other to the healing mission. They listened to God and each other; and they prayed.

As we gather today for the eucharist, we come with humility, knowing that each person is loved by God and no one is excluded. We come confessing our instinct to build bigger walls and bigger barns and not to care for our planet. We come valuing the human dignity of each child of God.

And we call on our bishops and the bishops of the Communion to be true to their calling to be our leaders and our shepherds. To focus on the needs of our world and not the internal needs of churches to build bigger walls. Do not not leave us feeling ashamed to call ourselves Anglican.

Heed the words of the psalmist (49)

Hear this, all you peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together.

My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation of my heart shall be understanding. Why should I fear in times of trouble, when the iniquity of my persecutors surrounds me,

those who trust in their wealth and boast of the abundance of their riches? When we look at the wise, they die; fool and dolt perish together and leave their wealth to others.

Their graves are their homes forever, their dwelling places to all generations, though they named lands their own.

Mortals cannot abide in their pomp; they are like the animals that perish.