

SERMON BY THE VERY REV. JOHN PAUL KENNINGTON

Rector of Christ Church Cathedral, Montreal and Dean of the Diocese of Montreal

On the occasion of the Installation of the Very Rev. Ken Gray as Rector of St. Paul's, Kamloops and Dean of the Anglican Parishes of the Central Interior

Sunday, May 1, 2016

In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

First of all thank you Bishop Barbara and thank you Ken for inviting me tonight. Ken is very well known and a much loved personality throughout all Canada and there are many other people who know Ken better and who could preach about Ken far better than I. In fact, I'm probably the only priest who doesn't have a whole raft of interesting stories from the past to tell you all about Ken - , but perhaps that why he asked me!

Seriously though, I've been asked because Montreal is a companion diocese with APCI, and because we are trying to see how our two cathedrals can work together. Our modern challenges are similar and yet our surroundings are different. Montreal is big, francophone, secular, predominantly Roman Catholic and Kamloops is - well - small and perfectly formed. We can learn from each other as we learn about each other.

And how lovely it is finally to be able to put on my résumé that I have preached at St Pauls Cathedral! Just last week I had coffee with David Sinclair and he told me all about you. Actually, it only served to confirm what I already knew about your honesty and openness, your faith, your generosity and your welcome. So thank you once again for asking me to come.

Everyone back home told me how very beautiful BC is, and yesterday Ken and Cathy took me wine tasting up in the hills, which was very nice, especially as I wasn't driving. Creation may be groaning in labour pains all around us - but here Creation is awe inspiring and glorious. Ken, who loves taking photos will just love the beauty here.

But before I get on to the more serious bit of the sermon, I want to send you some personal greetings from our Bishop Mary. She came into my office on Wednesday to make sure that I tell you how very sorry she is not to be able to be with you today and I know that she really wanted to come. Bishop Barbra is a great friend to the Diocese of Montreal and she has also been a great support for Bishop Mary as she takes on her new role.

Just a couple of weeks ago Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury was at the Anglican Consultative Council in Lusaka - where Ken would have been if he hadn't chosen the better part and been here instead.

And at a time when the temptation is always to highlight our Anglican differences and disagreements,

when conflict and division are crouching at the doors, archbishop Justin spoke about what he sees as the two main threats for the world today - and therefore the two main threats for the Church too - for if the Church isn't in the world - then it's up in the clouds ! He named them as religiously motivated violence and climate change.

When he spoke of religiously motivated violence he was of course speaking primarily about the very extreme violence we see on our televisions each day, and he is right to begin by condemning the brutal murders of innocent men women and children in Syria and just this week in the Philippines. Our thoughts and our prayers go to the family of John Ridsdell after his brutal execution just last week. I cannot imagine what it must feel like to know that the person you love could have been saved for a price of money. But as we know, he was not alone, there are thousands of others who have been murdered : Christians martyred in Libya and in Syria simply because they are Christians. Shiite Muslims, Alawites, Druze - all suffering persecution at the hands of violent men and all in the name of God. It is a most terrible and shameful thing to see something as beautiful as religion and the worship of God being so cruelly misused. It is a denial of our common humanity

All that violence may thankfully seem a long way away to us here tonight, but even here in Canada, and especially here in the Anglican Parishes of the Central Interior you know from bitter experience that violence and abuse in the name of God or in the name of doing what is right has many faces. As a white male Brit I am treading dangerously on holy ground, but now we are at last beginning to know and talk about the abuses suffered by aboriginal peoples at the hands of western colonisers, some of whom were undoubtedly cruel, all of whom were misguided, and easily misled by others. Early on in my time as Dean the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came to Montreal and I must confess - with a certain amount of shame at the British Education system - that although I had learned about sheep farming in Western Australia and about the Car industry in Detroit, I learned nothing about the abuse and torture which went on in the name of education or because of the doctrine of discovery, which is why call 62 is so important. At that TRC I read stories, I listened to testimonies, and I began to wonder what it must be like when people in authority - the very people you want to respect and look up to - your teachers, your priests - preach a God of love and compassion on Sunday and then beat, starve and imprison you for the rest of week - that too is a form of religiously motivated violence. Once again it is a denial of our common humanity.

And if all that still seems far away, every day there are new stories of violence and abuse which remind us that the quest for Truth and Reconciliation is never over. We are still groaning in our labour pains for the glorious liberty of the children of God. We are still hoping for what we do not yet see - and we are still waiting with patience for the reign of God to come on earth even as it is in heaven, as Jesus taught us to pray.

Yes, the Anglican Church of Canada has made great strides for equality for all genders and races and sexualities - even at the price of being misunderstood, misrepresented and to some extent abused by others in the name of God. Our primate has spoken out against violence of all sorts: violence against women, especially to aboriginal women, violence against minorities Archbishop Justin just last week in his meeting with Robert Mugabwe made a clear condemnation of homophobic violence and the criminalisation of people because of their sexuality. But there is always more to be done to rid the world

of violence and hatred and to proclaim God's reign of justice, peace and truth. The call of the Gospel is far from over.

And to bring us right back here - I think truth and reconciliation, justice peace and truth has to start here with us - in our local communities and in ourselves. Sunday by Sunday we praise God and we confess our sins and we know forgiveness. - Deep down inside us we know that there is always that potential to hurt others, to abuse them with our words, with our arguments and even with our theology, and even in the name of God.

One of the things I have learned over the past few years is that Cathedrals are often places where hard things can be named and spoken of respectfully, where people are not afraid of hearing about new things or of going into new places. So may this cathedral always be a respectfully groaning place like creation, longing for a glorious Liberty.

In tonight's Gospel Jesus prays : sanctify them in the truth : for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they may be sanctified in the truth.

There is a lot about Truth and sanctification in St John's Gospel and Jesus tells us that the truth will set us free, and that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

I am fascinated by truth. It can be used as a weapon with which to beat people up when it is in the wrong hands, and it can be a wonderful gift to set people free when it is in the right hands.

I remember my mother telling me that when she was a young girl and taught Sunday School in the 1940s, she knew exactly what the truth was. The Truth was clear. Politicians like Winston Churchill spoke the truth, the Church spoke the truth - and there was only one truth - and it was easy. As she grew older and as she grew in experience so truth became elusive, mysterious - perhaps she was merely discovering Pilate's question for herself : - What is Truth?

And now, older and wiser, I can say the same too. People really do have different truths they live by based on their own life experiences and even Science isn't true like it used to be. The old protons and neutrons and electrons have been replaced by quarks and string theory and things I don't understand; , far off galaxies and different universes. More and more Truth becomes a quest not a fact. What is Truth - then - when faced with billions and billions of light years of creation, and a creation in at least 11 dimensions?

And so I would like to suggest to you tonight that we will never be sanctified by those lesser truths - the facts we think we know, or by believing that we are right - or even in actually being right - rather we are sanctified by knowing the One who is Truth.

As we gather around this altar we bring many different views and opinions with us - our own personal truths which are many, about politics and religion and lifestyles. We are as richly diverse as we are many - we bring our experiences of the past and we bring our own understandings of the great doctrines of the creed, which are as subtle and varied as we are all subtle and varied, and like the Anglican Communion worldwide, we bring different views on the Church, authority, hierarchy, gender,

sexuality, and marriage - we are all different - as different as the shades of red and orange and yellow and green on the magnificent Canadian treescapes in the Fall.

This is a challenge for us, but Cathedrals are particularly good at it, because they allow space for the visitor, for people to remain anonymous at the back, room for the stranger.

And here, I believe, is one of the glories of our Anglican tradition - that Jesus draws us to this one altar not because we are right, or wrong, or because we all believe the right thing - but for our sanctification, because we are all seeking to know the one True God - we are seeking communion.

We stand together therefore, all of us, as broken and healed, confused and at times confusing, sinful, repenting and forgiven, and equal in our humanity - and we share the one bread and the one cup. I am always grateful that Jesus said 'do this for the remembrance of me ' and not say 'understand this for the remembrance of me'.

Eternal Life - then - is this, to know the One True God - our friend, our maker, our lover, - above all, in all and through all. It is an embrace not an answer. It is to know God in the Biblical sense of that word - it is to be one in love with God and with each other, just as Jesus is one with the Father.

Now, rather defensively I need to tell you that this sermon does not end here - Ken gave me strict instructions that I had to preach for at least 20 minutes to earn my supper, and I am a great believer that we should always try to keep our Dean happy.

And so the other topic which Archbishop Justin raised was Climate Change - that change in our world which is melting the polar ice caps, creating deserts and droughts and leaving behind poverty and warfare in sub-Saharan Africa, changing our weather systems that will eventually destroy the planet.

Now I am no expert on Climate Change - your new Dean knows much more about it and is passionate about our ecosphere. But as I studied and prayed over the texts of tonight's service I was struck by one word - futility - the idea that Creation was subjected intentionally to futility. What a strange word - futility - the same word, it turns out, that we read in the book of Ecclesiastes where it is translated Vanity - Vanity of Vanities, all is vanity.

It is hard to think of this beautiful creation as vain, or futile - or as being without true worth - so what can this word - futility - mean. What is St Paul trying to tell us. Why would God do this to us.

The text explains it by telling us that Creation is constantly groaning - longing to be delivered, longing to be set free - and I hope you noticed that when St Paul adds us human beings into that great longing and groaning of all creation - he is writing about the redemption of our aching bodies, not our spiritual or ethereal souls. St Paul reminds us that this flesh and blood which we are made of is part of that groaning. That we are all subject to futility.

And although that might sound a bit negative for a very happy evening, I actually quite like it - it reminds us that our aches and pains, our illnesses and physical quirks, our abilities and our disabilities - our successes and our failures, our old deaths and our new births, are all at one with the aches and

pains, the illnesses and quirks, the abilities and disabilities of all creation. That God has made this world, and has made each one of us inside this world not for some kind of static perfection - but with a beautiful fragility and a wonderful vulnerability so that we may not be too proud but may learn and grow and understand how to cherish the world and how to cherish one another with passion, for there is no passion without the possibility of pain.

It is as if God has subjected us all to fragility and vulnerability - so that we do not ever take our world, or one another, or ourselves, our souls and our bodies, for granted : so that we learn how to hope for something more, how to long and groan for a new heaven and a new earth where there is no more sorrow or sighing or tears - where death, the final enemy, is no more. And so I also hope that this cathedral will be happy in it's own created beautiful fragility and wonderful vulnerability, - a true gift from God.

Abram and Sarai set off together in faith and with hope with all their goods and family and friends. Fragile, old, vulnerable and open to attack. They go forward together because they fully trust the God they do not fully understand. I am sure that sometimes they looked back nostalgically for Ur of Chaldees - But on they went, their new home was to be a new land and they would even have to change their names.

May God therefore greatly bless your Cathedral and your new Territory. May God bless your ministries, your Dean, your bishop and each one of you, as you all move forward into a new territory, as you bravely and faithfully change your name. May you groan, and know God, may you be fragile and vulnerable, welcoming and passionate - and may you become what I know you already are - a blessing for the people, for all peoples, a blessing for all of us.

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