

Sunday 29 April, 2018

- **Induction Sermon:**
- **Right Reverend John Bluck Texts: Corinthians 3: 10 - 17**
- **Luke 17: 20 - 33.** Do you find there are some images that endure in your mind, long after you have forgotten the details of the story that surrounds them? I've got a few that stay with me of late. The pictures from Kabul of yet another suicide bomb attack, killing 50 and maiming another hundred, in that unrelenting war with the Taliban. **And the images of Aboriginal dancers at the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games**, or as they called it, "**The Stolenwealth Games**"; artists from an ancient tradition melding in with the lycra and technology of modern day athletics. **And the litany of Maori grievances**, as Pakeha call them, against building new prisons, because Maori are **seven times more likely than Pakeha** to be convicted for jail terms; or the Gisborne Maori community leader who called Captain Cook a "**syphillictic pirate**", on the eve of his anniversary. On **prime time TV news** what's more, which I thought was a bit rough. **The faces of all these people stay with me** as I prepared this sermon and looked around for the Good News of the Gospel that it's **my** job and **your** job to find and deliver. What **is** the good news for Afghan and Aboriginal and Maori people this year? And what is the good news for **us** in Birkenhead, with a by election looming and a motorway clogging up? **Churches everywhere are struggling to answer those questions**; to find where the kingdom that our gospel writer describes, is breaking in; not only out there but **in our midst**.

"For in fact, says Jesus, the kingdom of God is among you." The New Testament is very clear about where to look. It's spelt out in the **Sermon on the Mount**. The first to know the kingdom are the **poor**, the **sorrowful**, those who **hunger for justice**. The people on the TV news who fill the images in my mind know all about that. **Yet the connection between Gospel and these people's plight** doesn't seem obvious when we watch the news each night. As churches, we are all struggling to make sense of what's happening around us and to chart forms of ministry and discipleship that **might make a difference**. As disciples of Jesus we ought to be able to see **where redemption is possible** and where **resurrection is happening**, but our Christian voice is too often fragmented, divided, muted. **Being Christian in Aotearoa New Zealand** has never been easier because its never been less controversial, more often ignored. More fuss is made about trading on **Anzac Day** than **Easter Day**. We have merged as churches into the woodwork of Kiwi culture. What used to set us apart as Christians gets smoothed over, overlooked, ignored. When was the last time a mainstream church featured on the 6pm news? **This is the context for**

what we are doing this morning in the commissioning of a new ministry. Not just any old ministry but something experimental, different, not tried before. You're calling it "**intentional**", which means it's not "**business as usual**" but intended to find new ways of working together with each other and your neighbours. You intend to make some changes, you intend to include some new people, to push out the boundaries of St Andrews mission in this place. **And its "interim"** which means it's **experimental and explorative**. You're not committing yourself beyond two years. You don't know yet what the future will look like for St Andrews; but rather than waiting for it to roll over you, you intend **to try and shape it. That is very brave stuff** for any congregation to commission. I know a lot of churches that wouldn't have the nerve. I've never heard of an Anglican church attempting such a thing. If you wanted to keep your old life and ways of working safe, you wouldn't be commissioning this ministry and promising your support. The words of Jesus take on a special resonance this morning.

Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it; and whoever loses it will save it, and live. The hope and the promise embedded in **this commissioning** is that it will bring **new life**. You are doing a **brave thing** and I salute you for your courage. **And I salute Colin for accepting the brief**, with all its risks and unknowns. Interim ministries like this are **not** for the faint hearted. If he proves to be a little impatient and anxious to make some changes, please be tolerant with him, because with only two years **he needs to be a man in a hurry**. (He is anyway) I hope that in two years you and he will see the task needs more time because what you have found what needs to be done is worthwhile and fulfilling and unfinished. I hope you all with Colin's leadership will have **started things that can't be stopped**. **I'm talking about new partnerships**, new ways of being church, new connections with those most in need, both in Birkenhead and more widely. **Colin brings all sorts of skills to this ministry**. His pastoral abilities, for a start, which for the last few years have been focused on the dairy farmers of Rodney and the Kaipara. I don't know why Fonterra didn't hire him. They would have paid better, using the loose change from their retiring CEO's salary. **And his abilities to plan and strategise and take initiative**, well honed and tested in very diverse ministries both here and overseas. He knows how to **live with differences** – culturally, theologically, politically. He will listen carefully and respectfully to those differences right here in Birkenhead. The Tokelau and other Pacific people here, the Korean congregation will find a **friend** in Colin. **He will help good things to happen locally**, I'm confident of that. But equally important, he brings to you the experience of **how things happen globally**. **We all know that the challenges faced by our churches** are not confined to or defined by Birkenhead.

We live in a global world. The images that we see on television each night that baffle and paralyse us speak of the same issues that baffle and paralyse us here at home that stop us reaching out to our neighbours around the corner as much as around the world. **Colin has served in Afghanistan** as a chaplain with the Defence Force and knows close up and personal what tears people apart in that country. Just as he knows all about the dynamics of dispossession of **aboriginal people** in Australia from his time in outback ministry. Just as he knows about the anger and alienation of **Maori people** very personally from his ministry and family connections on the East Coast. **All that wealth of experience will inform his work** with you here in Birkenhead. Those connections that he brings between the local and the global and across the cultures might well prove to be the best resource he has to offer. Not only new ways of doing but **new ways of seeing**. **So when we talk about peace making internationally** and watch the dialogue between North and South Korea and the White House, our Korean colleagues who share this building make it a very close to home conversation. **And Colin's own whanau** will provide a bridge to understanding just what is going on in the conversation between Maori and Pakeha that keeps boiling over. **And the threat to our future posed by climate change** and global warming and rising sea levels is not theoretical for our Tokelau and Pacifica neighbours whose islands back home are already disappearing. **I don't know what the agenda for your ministry as St Andrews will be** as you build it together in the next two years, but I **do** know it will need to be informed by these local and global connections. And it will be shaped by each **one of you**, as much if not more than anything Colin brings. **"You are God's building"**, we are told in the reading from St Paul, **each one of you** is a precious part, a temple no less, of **what is holy**. **Your Presbyterian heritage is a Reforming tradition**, shaped by leaders who were impatient for change and renewal. **That's** how the Reformation began in Europe. **That's** how it needs to **continue in Birkenhead**. **It's an exciting time to be the church in the midst of all of this**. As our understandings of God expand to embrace the creation that astronomy and quantum physics keep revealing to us; as our spirituality expands from the personal and private to embrace the broken ecology and very survival of the planet; as our God given sense of justice challenges us to face up to the causes of dispossession and poverty and inequality. **There is no better time to be the church** and to apply the Gospel narrative **to all these issues** - so that we can see them not as random reasons to retreat and despair, but **signs of a new kingdom emerging**, a new commonwealth of justice and mercy and grace. **And wherever the church can join and broker that emerging order**, both local and global, we become the people **God made us to be** and we

join the work ***God gave us to do.*** **As you continue to discover that work together**, both the tasks you know so well, and the tasks you have yet to tackle with Colin's leadership, **may God bless you on this new journey of faith.**