

**Archbishop Thabo Makgoba**  
**Diocese of Cape Town: Synod Charge**  
**“Our Vision and Our Mission: God's Faithful People,  
Loving and Serving God's Church and God's World”**  
**20 August 2009**

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Mark 12:28-34

<sup>28</sup>One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, ‘Which commandment is the first of all?’ <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered, ‘The first is, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; <sup>30</sup>you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” <sup>31</sup>The second is this, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’ <sup>32</sup>Then the scribe said to him, ‘You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that “he is one, and besides him there is no other”; <sup>33</sup>and “to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength”, and “to love one’s neighbour as oneself”,—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.’ <sup>34</sup>When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the kingdom of God.’ After that no one dared to ask him any question. (NRSV)

Dear members of the Diocese of Cape Town, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I greet you in the precious name of the God who is love, and who calls us to live in love with him and with each other. May I also extend a warm greeting to all our guests. Thank you for being with us. And at this point, may I also thank Bishop Garth and the Advisory Committee, all those in the Diocesan Office, at Bishops court (especially my communications team), our hosts at St Cyprians, and everyone else who has contributed to the preparation of this Synod, and of my Charge. My family deserve particular gratitude for their patience and forbearance!

Although I have been at Bishops court for well over a year, sometimes I still feel like the new kid on the block. Today is one of those days – my first Diocesan Synod, and my first Charge. This is a little daunting! Yet when I look around, I recognise I am not among strangers. No: I am among familiar faces, among friends. So let me say thank you, Diocese of Cape Town, for the generous and loving welcome you have shown me and my family since our arrival in this beautiful city. Thank you that you have opened your hearts to us, and shared so much of yourselves, as we have begun to get to know one another – as friends, and as members together of the family of God.

It is as family that we meet in this Synod – brothers and sisters within the body of Christ. I therefore want to begin my Charge by reflecting on what it means ‘to be the body of Christ’. This phrase has become something of a motto to me, since I used it in my Installation Charge. There, I asked that we be partners in seeking ‘afresh to discover what is it to be the body of Christ in our time, and who God is in Jesus Christ, for us here and now.’ The same questions are before us tonight: Who are we, as the body of Christ? and who is God in Christ for us?

Our identity and our calling, as Christians, as Church, are dependent upon relationships: first, ours with Jesus Christ, and second, with everyone else who is also ‘in Christ’ – this is our basis for engaging in ministry and mission. In other words, first, we must grow in loving God, and second, we must grow in loving our neighbours: those

within the Church; and then – in company with one another – those beyond our walls. This is why I have chosen, in my first Charge to you all, to focus on these key areas – our identity and our calling, and what these mean for our mission and ministry.

Becoming Archbishop has deeply challenged my understanding of all this, in terms of being ‘the body of Christ’. One of the unexpected delights of becoming Primate has been encountering other Christians, other Anglicans, from every part of the world, and every imaginable culture, language, background and experience. In January I was in rural Mozambique: you can hardly imagine a place more different than Bishops court! Yet we share in the same Province. Then there was last year’s Lambeth Conference, with Bishops from the whole world; in February, the Primates met in Egypt and encountered the situation of Christians there; and in May I shared in the life of the Jamaican church during the Anglican Consultative Council meeting. Last month I was in London – where people every year celebrate and support the work of the Sisters of the Community of the Resurrection of our Lord in Grahamstown. And in May I was in New York, meeting the people of the Episcopal Relief and Development Fund who have provided extensive support to our Province over many years.

Everywhere I went, I found a strong sense of family, and joyful belonging together, that arose from recognising one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, no matter how foreign these people seemed in other respects. In ways I had not anticipated, I recognised Christ in them: I saw that he dwelt in them, and shaped their words, their actions, their lives. This has given me a passion for the unity of all Christians, for which Jesus prayed at the Last Supper, asking the Father that we might all be one, so that the world may believe in his Son (John 17:21).

It has also shaped my praying for the Anglican Communion, giving me an aching grief over our present divisions; and a deep yearning that we may overcome them, and, especially, that we set aside the sometimes appalling ways that brothers and sisters speak about, and deal with, each other. It breaks my heart to witness this. Yet I also remember that we are God’s church, because he has called each of us into relationship with him through his Son our Lord. Faith is his gift, far more than it is our choice.

So when I consider what it means to be the body of Christ, I am challenged, and reassured, and challenged again.

First, I am challenged to take time to get to know those who say they follow Jesus as Lord – who are earnestly desiring to love God with all their heart and mind and soul and strength – and yet whom I find different, even incomprehensible. I am challenged to set aside my prejudices, and be ready to be surprised by encountering Christ at work in their lives – making his home in them in ways I had not imagined, as they allow him to work his purposes in them and through them. I have seen the hand of God upon people in ways I was not expecting – and, having seen it, I could not deny it. Sometimes this has been unsettling.

But then I was reassured – because if I am in Christ, and you are in Christ, then no matter how great our other differences, neither of us can be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus – and therefore we cannot be separated from each other, within his embrace of love. Therefore we have a safe context for addressing our differences, knowing that we are bound together as the people of God. Within our own Diocese this means we do not need to be afraid of the diversity among us – and there are considerable differences of culture, language, wealth, education, circumstance, and more besides. Some, like poverty, we need to address; but some, like culture and language, we should treasure.

So then I am challenged again. How shall I share God’s love – not grudgingly, but wholeheartedly – with every sister and brother across this whole broad, rich, spectrum, who are each God’s gift to me within the body of Christ? There is a Sepedi

proverb that says: Mphiri o tee ga o lle – one bracelet does not make a sound. In other words, some things cannot be done alone. We need others.

Therefore, in what we say and resolve in the next two days, we must be sensitive to those family members who are not part of this Synod or Diocese – the wider Province, and the world-wide Communion, as well as the whole people of God of every denomination. In Synod too, we should be tender with one another: in our asking, in our responses, in what we seek, and how, and when – being especially sensitive to those who least see issues of life and faith as we do.

Let us be mindful that God deliberately creates us with so much otherness, such diversity, for his purposes. Like rough stones with sharp edges, we collide with against each other, as God uses us to knock off one another's awkward corners, and to polish us into smooth and beautiful gems – so we can better reflect his glory, each in our own way. Each of us needs to be refined in holiness, to be transfigured and transformed. So often, it is the relationships and circumstances with which we wrestle hardest, that prove to be the most valuable. Therefore we must learn how to love and cherish especially those with whom we find it hardest to rub along easily. In heart and mind, we uphold the truth that each one of us is equally loved by God, and equally called upon to love and be loved as he has loved us – even where we find it hard to connect with one another, or where there are questions over which we fundamentally disagree.

Of course, the obvious area where disagreements currently loom largest among Anglicans around the world is human sexuality and its expression. All too often we give the impression of being obsessed with sex! I would far rather that we were known as people obsessed with Jesus.

The German protestant theologian Karl Barth – perhaps the greatest theologian of the 20th century – visited the US towards the end of his long and distinguished career. He was asked what encapsulated the essence of his many profound books. After a moment's thought he answered 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'

For all of us, our integrity, our authenticity, as Christians, is based on Christ alone, and on the quality of our relationship with him. Jesus shares in our humanity so that, united in baptism with his death and resurrection, we, by the power of the Spirit, may be 'in Christ', and so partake of his divinity – the promise of eternal life at one with him, which we shall know in all its fulness, beyond death.

No one else can do this for us. Only Jesus is the incarnate second person of the Trinity – the 'Word made flesh'. He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Only Jesus is the sure and certain hope of forgiveness. He alone offers fresh beginnings, through salvation and redemption. With St Paul, we quote the lovely words of an unknown Greek poet: 'In him we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28).

And with confidence we look to him to direct this Synod's work. For in Jesus we find the ability to transcend the limitations and failings of humanity. He promises to transfigure and transform the mediocre and the fallible, into something where the glory of God is revealed, and God's eternal purposes bear fruit that will last into all eternity. Only in Jesus Christ do we find the redemptive healing of our souls from the pains of a broken and hurting world. Only in Jesus Christ do we find the wisdom to know how to live transformatively, and the courage and strength to do so. Only in Jesus will we find the vision to share this good news within our churches and within our city – and the means to do so.

As I preside at this Synod for the first time, let me say something about how I understand my own calling as Archbishop of Cape Town. The Prayer Book has many tasks for a bishop – to be a shepherd and pastor, a teacher and interpreter of the truth, and a focus of unity; to banish error, to proclaim justice, and to lead God's people in

their mission. Such leadership may find expression in different styles, according to the people exercising it, and the needs of particular circumstances.

By and large, I am not the sort of man to be out in front, telling others to do what I say. Only rarely will you see me forging ahead on my own and shouting 'follow me!' over my shoulder! Of course, it sometimes happens – especially when my pastor's heart moves me to act and speak out urgently – as I did after visiting Zimbabwe, or over the xenophobic attacks last year.

But in general, this is not who I am, and it's not what the Diocese needs as we meet in Synod. We are faced by tough challenges – but we also are at the start of what, I hope, will be a long journey together over the years ahead. I feel that my task is to promote, and encourage; to build bridges, and initiate conversations – so that we may draw out the best in one another as we travel forwards together. For within the body of Christ, writes St Paul, 'to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good' (1 Cor 12:7). Everyone should have the chance to offer the insights the Spirit gives and to contribute the gifts they have received.

Therefore I have enjoyed sharing conversations about this journey over the last year or so. I've enjoyed speaking with people on my parish visits, as well as through our Family Day; the Clergy school; Diocesan Standing Committee; and the Chrism Mass sermon, which I hope you have discussed within your parishes. If not, I hope you will at least re-read it as your overnight home-work!

The themes I feel that are emerging from these conversations mirror those of the two great commandments. First is the call to grow in loving God, and to be deliberate in developing spiritual growth and theological understanding among clergy and laity alike – and so to increase our confidence in God, and in living out the faith to which he calls us. Second is the call to love our neighbours – a two-fold call, to love and serve God's church, and to love and serve God's world.

This is the context I, as your Bishop, offer, as we take counsel together. A Bishop's role should be personal, collegial and communal. It is personal because there are tasks and responsibilities that belong to the Bishop alone – such as presiding at Synod. It is collegial, because all bishops are called to be in relationships of mutuality with one another – throughout this Province, throughout the global Anglican Communion, and even with all other bishops of God's Church throughout the last twenty centuries. This is an awesome concept, and forces us to hold the perspectives of the universal church alongside the particularities of life here and now. Thirdly, a Bishop's ministry is communal – because one is only truly a bishop among the community of which one is shepherd, pastor and teacher. As Anglicans, we speak about being a 'bishop-in-Synod', for episcopal leadership is exercised in conjunction with one's Diocesan Synod.

This is why I have structured our agenda so that, once the Charge is delivered, we will have rather more time for dialogue than usual. For we come together as the family of God, gathered around the one table, breaking bread and sharing conversation as any family does. So there are opportunities to speak and to listen – and again, I hope that our obsession with Jesus will make him, our host at this Eucharist, our focal point. I hope we can speak and listen to how the life of the body of Christ is being experienced and challenged in the varying circumstances of our parishes. I hope we can speak and listen about what threads, what patterns we are discerning, when we meet in groups. I hope we can speak and listen, over meals and in tea and coffee breaks. And – because God gave us one mouth and two ears, so we should do twice as much listening as speaking – I hope we will listen attentively to the voice of the Word made flesh, in our worship; in our Bible Studies; and when we pause each day at noon for prayer.

Tomorrow morning, I will say more about the structuring of each day at Synod, but let me now just say a little to set the context for our deliberations together. Remember: we have a far horizon ahead of us – it stretches through to 2019. This is the timescale for our planning. We are not called to try to solve everything at once.

Let me share another Sepedi proverb: Nonyana phakuphaku e bea lee le ntoo – a hurrying bird lays only one egg. If we are too hasty, our achievements are likely to be limited. Let's bear in mind the big picture with its long perspective, and plan for a nest full of eggs!

At the heart of this vision is God's desire that everyone should have the opportunity for abundant life which Jesus promised (John 10:10). So we can expect that God has achievable tasks for us, wherever that abundant life needs to be nurtured and encouraged.

Let me just list a few areas:

- poverty – and all that feeds off it
- crime, drugs and violence
- HIV and AIDS, together with TB
- adequate health care for all

(Here let me mention that we continue to monitor the spread of swine flu closely, and will issue guidance as it is needed. Please be guided by prudence, not panic, especially as our public health sector is already overstretched. I offer our condolences to the families and friends of all who have died.)

- education
- the environment.

It may not be our responsibility – it often is not – to provide all the answers. But it is for us to discover and make clear the sort of values we want to bring to bear, to help transform situations and open up redemptive possibilities.

So then, let me sum up - the task before us is to discern what is it to be the body of Christ in our time, and who God is in Jesus Christ, in our Diocese in the ten years ahead. Our answer will be shaped by our response to the two great commandments: First, how shall we help all the people of the Diocese to love God more fully, especially through spiritual and theological development? Second, how shall we better love and serve our neighbours – both within the church, and within the wider world? As Jesus said, to follow these is to come close to the kingdom. For I am sure, that, taken together, these themes will be a firm foundation for all our ministry and mission, and a strong backbone for our vision also, as we live out our calling as the body of Christ in this place.

May God bless us as we seek his will, and make us a blessing to others – for his praise, and for his glory. Amen.