

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Diocese of Cape Town: Synod Charge
“The Good News of Faith and Love”
25 August 2011

Matthew 24:42-51

⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

⁴⁵Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time? ⁴⁶Blessed is that slave whom his master will find at work when he arrives. ⁴⁷Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁸But if that wicked slave says to himself, “My master is delayed”, ⁴⁹and he begins to beat his fellow-slaves, and eats and drinks with drunkards, ⁵⁰the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know. ⁵¹He will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

⁶But Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us—just as we long to see you. ⁷For this reason, brothers and sisters, during all our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you through your faith. ⁸For we now live, if you continue to stand firm in the Lord. ⁹How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? ¹⁰Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

¹¹Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. ¹²And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. ¹³And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Dear members of the Diocese of Cape Town, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, dear friends, I greet you in the precious name of God, who calls us to live holy and blameless lives of love and faith with him and with each other. I also extend a warm greeting to all our guests. Thank you for being with us.

As I begin, let me also thank Bishop Garth and the Advisory Committee; everyone in the Diocesan Office; all at Bishopscourt; Archdeacon Anthony Langenhoven and his team at St Cyprians; and everyone else who has contributed to this Synod, and to my Charge. As always, my family deserve particular gratitude for their patience and support – along with the nearest and dearest of others heavily involved in preparations. Let me pay special tribute to Tony Hillier. We give particular thanks for his work over many years, and wish him every blessing as he prepares for retirement.

The theme of my Charge is ‘The Good News of Faith and Love’. St Paul writes to the Thessalonians that Timothy has brought him the good news of their faith and love. Faith and love are always good news. When brothers and sisters in Christ live together in faith and love, they encourage one another, and build one another up in Christian maturity. When the people of God are full of faith and love, they are a beacon of light and hope to the surrounding community. When churches overflow with faith and love, they encourage Christians throughout the body of Christ – as the Thessalonians encouraged St Paul.

But the best ‘good news of faith and love’ is that both start with God – the God who is love, the God who is faithful. Our faith, our love, owe everything to his overflowing generosity. ‘We love’ says St John ‘because he first loved us’ (1 Jn 4:19). ‘God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us,’ writes St Paul (Rom 5:8). The Psalmist recounts God’s faithfulness nearly forty times. And the writer to the Hebrews describes Jesus Christ as a ‘faithful high priest in the service of God’ (Heb 2:17).

There is no greater good news than discovering God's love and faithfulness for ourselves: that it is not just a general attitude towards creation and humanity, but it is for you and for me! Our knowledge and experience of God, and our ability to reflect his love and faithfulness to others, should keep growing throughout our Christian lives. We will never find their limits – no matter what life brings, God's love, God's faithfulness, are greater.

So the central question of my Charge is this: how we can grow in this good news of faith and love?

Growth can, and should, involve both quantity and quality: growth in numbers and growth in depth, in maturity, in Christlikeness. Both are challenges to an historic church like ours, in a city of many denominations and Christian groups. We should not despise the inevitability that much of what we do is in 'maintenance' mode. We have a rich heritage – in people, liturgy, buildings, schools, homes, resources – and we must uphold and preserve and pass on the best of it. Overall we are in pretty good shape. We may have deficits or surpluses from year to year, but the big financial picture is sound. For this we have much to thank God – and firm foundations from which to tackle the challenges of growth with confidence.

Earlier this month I attended the Classic Pops concert that Bishops holds every three years at the City Hall. It was wonderful: well prepared and well executed, with committed boys who were exuberantly joyful in what they were doing. We left with our hearts singing.

And I asked myself – how often does our worship do this? Surely we should expect to have our hearts set on fire with the Spirit, to find ourselves fed and filled with Christ's holy, healing, wholesome body and blood – and uplifted not just for an hour or two, but strengthened for the whole week ahead. Do we come to church – and give others reason to come to church – hungry for more of God, and expecting both to find our hunger met, and to be stirred to yearn even more deeply for him?

Perhaps for those of us who are long-term church leaders – clergy or laity – the risk is that we are not entirely expecting the Son of Man to turn up in our midst. It is easy to get comfortable running things in his absence – as Jesus' parable warned! So we must be awake and alert; and expect the Master to come, even though he will probably upset our comfortable routines. Yet only in his presence will we find true life.

So then, let us, above all else, seek his life-changing presence evermore fully for ourselves and for those around us. As St Paul prayed for the Thessalonians, let us 'pray earnestly that God will restore whatever is lacking in our own faith.' We must seriously consider opportunities for renewing, deepening and sharing the good news of vibrant faith and passionate love for God, his creation, his people.

Two synod motions point to valuable resources: 'Small Christian Communities, Renew Africa'; and 'Church Growth, Fresh Expressions'. Both focus on growth rooted in Scripture and deepening spirituality – growth rooted in the love and faith of God for us, and our desire to know it and share it, more and more.

We must also consider the sort of leadership we need to encourage among each other now, and for the future generations. I cannot emphasise strongly enough the importance of the Endowment Fund in ensuring we leave a legacy of well-trained Clergy and laity. The motion on Lay Training is another key element.

Our gospel reading has more to say about the particular expectations placed upon those of God's servants who have responsibilities of both leadership and care over others: 'Who then is the faithful and wise slave, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time?' (Mt 24:45).

Members of Synod, these words, and the advice and warnings that come with them, are for us. How are we doing in the leadership we offer to the Diocese of Cape Town? How are we doing in the way we run our parishes, our churches, our diocesan bodies, including homes and schools, and in how we use our resources?

In church jargon, we might talk about good stewardship, collegiality, and being answerable to one another within the body of Christ. In the language of the secular world, these are matters of good governance and accountability. These are the standards to which we regularly call politicians and other leaders across all sectors of society. But we can only

provide a moral compass for others if our lives are directed by God in this way. For the world's standards of good governance and accountability are merely a secular reflection of the holy and blameless life to which St Paul called the Thessalonians; they are one aspect of the wise and faithful service which Jesus asks of his followers.

We must be ready to learn from the best of secular practices. Therefore, several Synod measures propose improvements to our structures and practices. These include renaming the historic Archdeacon to the Ordinary more accurately as the Archdeacon to the Bishop of Table Bay. Second, we must ensure a clear and transparent relationship between financial and administrative tasks in the work currently undertaken by the Diocesan Secretary. Third, in line with the King III report, we propose to establish an Audit Committee, a Remuneration Committee and a Legislation Committee. These will help ensure we operate in ways that promote our desire to be wise and faithful servants, of our God, and of those to whom he sends us. In responding to this calling, we also propose amending the Diocesan Resource Teams chapter of the Diocesan Acts, to strengthen our commitments to the Environment, and to the pressing and severe needs of Social Development and Social Responsibility.

Yet, let me hasten to add, we are not environmental activists, nor social workers, nor politicians, nor moral commentators – though we may contribute in all these areas and many more. Our unique calling is to do what no-one else can do: to live out our baptismal promises in lives of faithful worship, witness and service. How can we best bring the good news of Jesus Christ, his healing touch, his redemptive power, to areas of need, suffering and deprivation? Sent by God, at his direction and in his power, we can roll up our sleeves, and get our hands dirty, and confidently engage with the messy realities, and the dire needs, of so many of God's children alongside whom we live and work in this city. This is the lesson of Jesus' incarnation.

And I am sure that the all-encompassing breadth of Jesus' redemptive death and resurrection should press us not only to address symptoms but also causes. Reflecting on some of contemporary society's persistent and pressing problems led me to write in my diary one day:

'When it comes to true leadership in our times, NGO development projects and charities do little more than scratch at the surface of poverty. The disparity between rich and poor continues unabated, even grows; and poverty reaches pandemic proportions. Interventions to reverse this trend will not come through democracy and elections alone. While these are critical for an open society, so far they have shown no signs of translating into prosperity for all – especially the poor who remain outside the economic mainstream of the world.'

It seems to me that what is required is a reconceptualization of leadership – and here I am not talking only about Christian leadership, but about all leadership.

We need a reconceptualization of leadership as stewardship of God's resources; stewardship as in Jesus's parable, which entails ensuring that all those over whom one exercises authority receive 'their allowance of food at the proper time'. In other words, leaders across all sectors must act intentionally to ensure there is equitable access to, and sharing of, the God-given resources of our planet.

The last 50 years have brought widespread political emancipation across Africa – but economic emancipation has all too often benefited a narrow political elite, while largely entrenching previously advantaged minorities. The poor majority do not even get the crumbs.

Everyone needs clean water, basic sanitation, decent housing, and effective access to adequate education and health care. Economic empowerment must promote mass employment. This is primarily governments' task – but the private sector must also come to the party, if we are to ensure a true 'broad-based' approach that encompasses those excluded by current economic models. Others look to the Church also to play a significant role – earlier this month, the Minister of Health sought our support for his efforts to make a decent and affordable level of health care to all South Africans. But the question remains of

how we can best play a significant, tangible, role in economic development and emancipation – and help bring the authentic good news to the poor which Jesus promised.

My challenge to you is to bear this question in mind, over the next two days, most of all, in our worship and in our seeking of God's directing. But hold it also in your mind in conversations over meals, in debates, in group work – as we consider matters raised in measures and motions, as well as other priorities from theological education to children and young people; from Anglican Communion affairs, including the crisis facing the church in Zimbabwe, to those who are dying of hunger in Somalia; from the Communion's listening process, to gender and Provincial Guidelines for pastoral care of those in, or affected by, same-gender Civil Unions.

As we seek God's answers, I am sure that we will find that our social ills or lack of wellbeing require solutions rooted as much in spiritual health as in economic policy-making. By God's grace, the gospel readings for the next two days provide us with more food for thought. These will provide the basis for my reflections in the morning homilies, and a spring-board for our Bible Studies.

As we consider these, I hope we can bear in mind the deeper question of how we can make our parishes centres of the good news of faith and love, and of encountering Christ in daily life – in ways that not only touch our hearts and souls, and the domestic arenas of family and personal life, but also help us to follow Christ's leading in every public area of life, including work and economics. How can we go beyond providing the crumbs of charity – important though these are – and start changing the systems that leave so many in need of help, rather than empowering them to help themselves? How do we become part of God's solution – identifying and rooting out all that impedes his command that humanity, and every human individual, should flourish; and that creation should be fruitful? What biblical values might this journey demand, what sort of questions do we need to ask and what sort of activities do we need to engage in? What type of leadership do we need to nurture the Churches' contribution in this area, and enable this to happen?

Reflecting on my ministry since coming to Cape Town, I have felt intensely that the underlying theme running through my busy life is the call to be a leader who is above all else a pastor. I feel my call to be pastor on occasions like today, and in archdeaconry teas, as well as in the joy I feel when visiting our churches, organisations, schools and homes, across the Diocese. It is what I feel when we open Bishopscourt for an annual party for those at our Children's Homes. Let me here publicly thank Patricia de Lille, as, formerly MEC for Social Welfare, and now Mayor, for her support; and also thank our Anglican Schools for their help. I feel it in many areas of working with Bishop Garth and Tony Hillier – and I am looking forward to exploring fresh ways at the Cathedral with our new Dean.

I have also felt the importance of pastoral leadership when walking with the poorest communities of our Diocese and City. Nothing I experienced growing up in Alexandra township prepared me for the dire conditions I have encountered in areas of Khayelitsha. Through practical engagement on issues like sanitation I have often found close fellowship and growing partnership with leaders of other churches and faith communities. Their experiences and perspectives also help my own grappling with how to tackle the many social and economic challenges that confront us on a daily basis.

Let us continue that grappling together in Synod in the days ahead, placing ourselves in the hands of the living God. Let us seek his direction that we may better make the unique contribution he asks of us – as pastoral leaders, or however he calls us – to strive as fully as possible, for the building of his kingdom, for the redemption of creation and all within it, and the glorifying of his holy name. Let us be faithful and wise, let us be awake, alert and expectant – as Jesus expects of his servants. Let us, as St Paul exhorts, pursue holy and blameless lives, of earnest prayer. And let us increase and abound in love for one another, for our God, and for his world.

Let us be people who grow in knowing and sharing the Good News of Faith and Love. Amen.