

Building on the Foundation of Christ

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Preacher: Bishop Genieve Blackwell

[0:00] It is good to be here this morning, particularly for the confirmation, where we will hear the confirmation declare in the words of the ancient creed, which joins us with Christians over the centuries, just as we declared ourselves, the Apostles' Creed.

And it is also good to be here at this particular point in the life of the parish of Holy Trinity Doncaster. Just so you know, many of you won't know me, but I thought I would say since we've got the AFES mission spot today, in 1983 I was Secretary of the Sydney University Evangelical Union, and I do remember Andrew Reid, not so much from 1983, but it was somewhere in the 80s. It must have been AFES conferences and things like that, so there you go. It was great to connect with Andrew again when I came to Melbourne. The message of 1 Corinthians chapter 3 is the Lord has a part for each of us to play in building, in growing the kingdom of God. It's God's field, God's building, and we are God's servants. And confirmation, I think, as well as when we think about where Holy Trinity is up to in entering into that co-operating parish agreement, releasing people to be part of the parish of St. John's Blackburn, looking to a new future, that that is actually a real reminder that each and every one of us have a part to play. I'm excited, as I hope you are, for the opportunity it is for both parishes. When I've been here previously, I haven't actually been to this service before, but I have been here a number of times, besides Andrew's commissioning service. When I've been here previously to the Chinese congregations, I've spoken about how the names of our different episcopates convey the meaning of our diocesan vision, making the word of God fully known.

And there are some of these leaflets up the back on your way out if you want to take one. Change is very much a reality. The Mamangatha Episcopate, which you may or may not be aware of, but that's the episcopate you're a part of. The Mamangatha Episcopate, their names given in consultation with the elders of the Rundu tribe. And Mamangatha means divine supreme being.

They're the parishes largely in the central part of Melbourne, experiencing urban renewal, the community changing around us. Houses replaced with units and apartments. And I always remember Andrew Reid saying to me when I first came that it might not be houses or apartments, Geneve, but it is things like, you know, what used to be one house might be three or four. Changing demographics, whether socioeconomic, ethnic or age. And this leaflet really outlines the different strategic directions we have looking to make that vision a reality. We want to be a compelling and outward looking Christian presence in our communities, present for the sake of others, the communities we know and are familiar with, the communities, as I said, continuously changing around us as we speak, and the communities that are yet to be, ones that have rabbits running around them at the moment. We will only be a compelling and outward looking Christian presence in our communities as we pull together. Both Andrew and Andrew Reid were aware that for Holy

Trinity to continue to grow, to continue to be outward looking, that you needed to be looking to plant new congregations. But that in terms of this plant, this site, you're outgrowing its buildings, despite the fact that there's even more development going on with the childcare and with all the careful development of the site. And the preference was to do that with an already existing Anglican church. I can tell you it was good for me to know the parish incumbency representatives at the time of Andrew's appointment were on the same page.

[4:12] Being a compelling and outward looking Christian presence in our communities, as we pull together, that is what will enable us to reach across boundaries of human division, to serve our communities, and proclaim Christ across economic boundaries, ethnic and language boundaries, across generational boundaries. That's our second strategic direction. And of course, Holy Trinity has known that, haven't you? Next year, I look forward to celebrating with you the 20th anniversary of the Chinese congregations, established in Bishop Paul Barker's time here as your vicar. The cooperating agreement with St. John's is enabling two church plants, Mandarin-speaking and English-speaking. And St. John's is increasingly aware that even the English-speaking congregation there will be different to the past.

human language, cultural difference. These are opportunities, opportunities which can convey so much about how our differences are our strength in demonstrating our faith, making the word of God fully known. It's an all-inclusive vision. It's to be able to present everyone. And in Colossians 1, where it comes from, St. Paul means everyone mature in Christ.

And we saw that graphically in our gospel today, didn't we? Even Jesus, who clearly emphasized a time Gentiles, those who weren't Jews, would come to share the blessings of the kingdom. I mean, think of the centurion servant in Matthew chapter 8 and what Jesus says about that incident.

Even Jesus seems to be surprised that it's all happening this quickly. No more privilege for the children. All can be healed. All must hear and soon. It can be very hard to think beyond ourselves to be prepared to move out of our comfort zone. I'm very thankful for the sake both of St. John's, but more importantly, the community around in Blackburn, that you're prepared to do that, to move out of your comfort zone. To release Andrew to be vicar of both parishes. To release Mark and Alex to have particular oversight at St. John's. And more than that, to release the people needed to plant vibrant congregations there. There's a very faithful congregation there, but it's small. And they know they cannot move into the future without help. The opportunity here is, the exciting thing is, there will be more room for people to come and belong. That's the plus for Holy Trinity Doncaster.

Let me come back to the epistle, the reading I want to focus on this morning. In chapter 3 of 1 Corinthians, and I know that I'm really just reminding you of what you heard early in the year, because I know you've done this whole big series on 1 Corinthians. St. Paul is picking up on the issue which has got him going right into the Corinthians. The divisive faction fighting that's been going on there. He's heard people say, you know, I belong to Apollos, I belong to Paul, and so on in chapter 1.

[7:50] And here in chapter 3 he's saying, isn't he, that's adults acting like children. And Paul expects better of them. More than that, as he puts it in chapters 1 and 2, and as he says right at the beginning of chapter 3, more than that, it's taking on the wisdom of the world. It's not speaking God's wisdom, the wisdom of the wisdom of the spirit. It's being merely human. The Corinthians have missed the point. What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants. Servants to whom you came to believe as the Lord assigned to each. It is God. Not Paul, Apollos or anybody else, but God they should be talking about. Why? Verses 6 to 9. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The others, they're God's instruments. Each have a part, but that is what they are. They're God's instruments.

The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. For we are God's servants, working together. You are God's field, God's building. And that's the same for us. God's servants, working together. Each have different tasks, but that's okay. We're all on the same side. Both Holy Trinity Doncaster and St. John's Blackburn have seen significant change from a rural orchard community, experiencing urban development, and now urban renewal. As I said, significantly changing again, both in terms of density and diversity.

And you are choosing to help water, help build on what has gone before at St. John's Blackburn, to use the two metaphors or images St. Paul uses to get his point across. And I do feel they're very apt, given the orchard history and future building plans at both places.

And not only that, you here at Holy Trinity Doncaster are not just resting on your laurels, so to speak, not, you know, hanging on to the glory days, but facing the fact that for you to continue growing, to build on past ministry, you're open to significant change. Blackburn and Doncaster, God's field. Holy Trinity and St. John's, God's building.

It's keeping the perspective of St. Paul. He had a very special role to play in the Corinthian church. No doubt about that, planting, laying the foundation. But St. Paul never lost sight that ultimately he's God's servant. He was working with others and the building wasn't his, it was God.

[11:23] And it's in the light of that, that we hear St. Paul's challenge. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it.

Firstly, the foundation for no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid. That foundation is Jesus Christ.

Any other foundation, not the church. Might be a lovely group of people who meet together or think they should, but it's not the church. Might be a very busy group of people, but it's not the church.

However you build, it's not to move from the foundation of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the reason we belong together. Jesus is who Holy Trinity, Don Caster, St. John's Blackburn have in common.

It is Jesus people are to hear about. Him, not us, nor any system we work out as to how we think people ought to live. It's Jesus whom we are to keep on getting to know better.

[12:31] It is Jesus whom we are to live like and live for. It's Jesus whom we love. Secondly, how or what do we build on that foundation?

What kind of building are we building? What sort of materials are we choosing to work with? Does it matter? Yes. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw, the work of each builder will become visible.

For the day will disclose it because it will be revealed with fire and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward.

If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss. The builder will be saved, but only as through fire. A searching test is being talked about here.

It will purge out the dross and leave the pure metal, the work of the builder, being judged, tested. As you look back over your life, how would you say you have built on the foundation of Jesus Christ?

[13:49] Would you describe it as gold, silver, precious stones? Or wood, hay and straw? What about now?

As you live out your faith, now, Is it quality work? Enduring? Precious?

Work that in the age to come, say in a thousand years or more, we won't be tired of talking about? What will survive in terms of the kingdom of God? What will be the sort of things we will keep talking about?

At our last synod, the Archbishop highlighted two key challenges we faced in enabling this vision to be a reality. He's been doing that for the last couple of years. Firstly, the challenge of committing to ensure future ministry in an ever-growing city.

Whether we're talking right here in Doncaster and Blackburn, or the growth corridors to the... I've got a hopeless sense of direction, by the way. To the north and west of the diocese in the Uddinong gathering episcopate, Bishop Kate.

[14:56] Or to the south and east in the Jambanna episcopate proclamation. Bishop Paul, of course, whom you know well. In the past, churches were an accepted part of the community.

Land would be set aside. Not so now. It will cost to be able to be present. People, buildings, land in the communities being planned and established today.

That's actually why the diocese is an overt partner. We're always a partner, really, but an overt partner in the cooperating parish agreement together with Holy Trinity and St John's.

So that down the track, together, we can achieve the full potential of the St John's site to support ministry here, yes, but also in the growth corridors at the same time as ensuring parish renewal now.

But more than that, we don't come to this challenge from a position of strength. We have to acknowledge that trust in the church as an institution is at an all-time low.

[16:03] Partly because of the other challenge the Archbishop highlighted, owning the consequences for where the church has failed those in our care, wood, hay, straw.

And doing all we can now to prevent such abuse happening again. These challenges will cost. Yet I want to say, we don't need to be anxious.

We simply need to be open to the Holy Spirit, transforming lives to be mature in Christ, our third strategic direction. The church's task is primarily God's work.

And God gifts us through his Spirit for this work. As I said, the work of each builder will be tested on the Day of Judgment.

God is not just interested in getting people into the kingdom. God cares how we grow and develop what sort of people we become. And if the work survives, the builder receives a reward.

[17:10] That is the great joy at seeing the lasting result of our work. A job well done. Knowing God's approval.

People influenced by our work. The visible result of our efforts. That's joy we know now. It's joy we can know in the future.

And we can think, with those for whom their work has burnt up, well, they might not know that joy reward. They'll be saved. It's like they'll have to dash through the flames, though, to escape to safety.

And you can think, well, at least they got there. But God wants us to be the best builders we can be. And it's the Spirit who enables us to be that.

It is the Holy Spirit transforming lives to be mature in Christ, which will enable us, as our fourth strategic direction, the enabler puts it, to use all the energy that God powerfully inspires to free us up as the people of God.

[18:16] We're blessed in this diocese with the many and varied gifts of our people. We're blessed with financial and property resources, as you know, in being able to develop the childcare.

It's about using, isn't it, our financial and property resources wisely, as Holy Trinity Doncaster has sought to do and is continuing to seek to do in this partnership.

And it matters, as I said, because how you build will be tested. And verses 16 and 17, it also matters because of who we are as the church.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person.

For God's temple is holy and you are that temple. It is in us, those being confirmed today, all of us, people at St. John's Blackburn, the people here at Holy Trinity Doncaster.

[19 : 26] It is in us that God dwells through his Spirit. Of course it matters what sort of church is built. It is the dwelling place of God. And it is as God's temple, and only as God's temple, we are able to reach across boundaries and be a compelling and outward-looking presence in our communities, making the word of God fully known today.