

## Synod Sermon

**The Right Reverend Jim White, Assistant Bishop of Auckland**

**5 September 2019**

**St Mary's in Holy Trinity Cathedral, Auckland**

*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'*

In the name of the living, loving, liberating God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Some of you may know the superb choral anthem by Vaughan Williams:

*O taste and see how gracious the Lord is*

*Blest is the one that trusteth in him*

The choir is treating us tonight by agreeing to sing it during communion

Based on Psalm 34.8 and written for Queen Elizabeth's Coronation it was a still point in the hurly burley of the grand trumpets and crownings and carrying on.

In its beauty and quietness it is utterly insistent that we should taste and see how gracious the Lord is.

A companion piece to the anthem might well be Denise Levertov's poem 'O Taste and See'

*O Taste and See*

*The world is*

*not with us enough*

*O taste and see*

*the subway Bible poster said,  
meaning The Lord, meaning  
if anything all that lives  
to the imagination's tongue,*

*grief, mercy, language,  
tangerine, weather, to  
breathe them, bite,  
savor, chew, swallow, transform*

*into our flesh ...*

[our  
deaths, crossing the street, plum, quince,  
living in the orchard and being

hungry, and plucking  
the fruit.]

Levertov tells us that 'the world is not enough with us.'

I imagine that for many of you older hands at Synod you have felt that about synod from time to time: that we are talking about ourselves to ourselves on some giant ecclesiastical hamster wheel. In recent times, to make ourselves feel better, we have passed more than a few motions that amount to us shouting out the window at the neighbours (or the government). The disconcerting thing is that it seems the neighbours have stopped listening to our outbursts - and that only adds stacks on still to the feeling that the world is not enough with us.

I do need to say, especially, to the new synod members, that in large part it is right and our bounden duty that we *do* talk to each other about our own life precisely because it is at Synod that we shape and order the life of the Anglican church. It irks me more than a little when I hear Anglicans say that our leaders – usually meaning bishops - won't do this or that. The fact is that you are the leaders. Together, lay, ordained, and bishops decide on our life and what we (including bishops) can and can't do. Lay, ordained, and bishops in council together is how the fundamental leadership of our church occurs and we have Bishop Selwyn and the Holy Spirit to thank for that. Synod is very important – and I say that as someone who has suffered in the past from fairly 'acute synodical eczema'.

To help us, however, with the problem of world not being enough with us; today in our lectionary we are to remember Mother Theresa of Calcutta. Just the mention of her name has us draw to heart in mind the world and the most desperate of the least, the lost, and last. Theresa's sanctity and devotion to the poor and sick levers opens our doors and windows and the world in its need is more with us. She even pushes us out toward the door and some of us into costly mission.

And it isn't all the doing of Theresa. The fact is that in many, many ways Anglicans, sometimes in apparently small and insignificant ways, have been not so bad as crossing the road and helping those who are helpless and hurting. As the sometime chair of the Auckland City Mission – sometime chair, sometime preacher, in name if not in reality... The Mission is approaching its centenary next year ... I am very conscious of the Anglican devotion and generosity at the beginnings of the Mission and continuing all the way through to today where we are up raising millions of dollars for the more than 90 million dollar project Mission Homeground and right now very grateful for the generosity of Anglicans in parishes and ministry units across the diocese. More than \$180,000 from parishes in the "Lenten appeal"

The world may not enough with us but we are with the world in some measure – with the world in its need and beauty, sorrow and joy.

But the World is not enough with us ... and, you know, that is a good thing ...

We have allowed 'mission focus' of various shapes and flavours to take the reins over last couple of decades and more.

The big trap is, however, as the great theologian Jurgen Moltmann tells us, is that: "[the] categories of new freedom have given way to moral categories of the new law and new obedience one decade at a time.

Being a sometime-philosopher I would suggest there is a hidden premise at play here. A hidden premise is precisely that - a source of justification which is hidden from view. The hidden premise here is that, somehow, God's glory and happiness is accidental and dependent on humanity's response. If only we are more moral, more mission focused, more obedient to the law, we can bring about God's happiness, and, as of course, our own salvation. This is a dangerous and grave theological error.

But we are not part of that world, we are, justified by faith. Further, God's joy and happiness is not dependent on us and yet we know that God finds great further joy in our loving acceptance and enjoyment of the overflowing of divine love.

'O taste and see how gracious the Lord is.'

We do this in the Anglican church first and foremost in Eucharist. Sometimes the eucharist is referred as the source and summit of the church's life. You see the Anglican church is a sacramental church. To be sure we engage in mission but we do it because ... well, "the because" is best expressed at the opening of the liturgy for the sacrament of baptism that tells us:

E te whānau a te Karaiti / Dear friends in Christ,  
God is love, God gives us life.  
We love because God first loves us.

First, God's love comes always and eternally.

We participate in the gift of God's love and God's glory, God's gifts, and in and through that and because of that we in turn give to others. Full of gratitude we give back to God - first fruits in turn to be distributed to God's people.

We worship, we share in the sacramental life, because we are not really part of this world, we are part of the New Jerusalem, citizens of heaven and citizens of earth.

O taste and see how gracious the Lord is.

We begin the life of Synod in our sacramental life. That is why we have the 'all present and correct' declaration at the beginning. Because this is where begin our life over and over, 'Do this in remembrance of me. ...'

O taste and see ...

*... my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me.*