

Sermon, Service of Thanksgiving and Remembrance,

Sunday, 7th November, 2021 – St Faith’s Church, Quairading & Holy Trinity Church, York

Sunday, 14th November, 2021 – St Mark’s, Brookton & St Mary’s Church, Beverley

Readings: Leviticus 23:9-14; Matthew 5:1-12, Romans 6:3-9; John 15:9-17

Hymns: Praise and Thanksgiving, The Lord is my Shepherd, Lobe Divine, all loves excelling, Now thank we all our God; Jesus Christ is Risen Today

It could be said that we don’t always do saying “thank you” well, appropriately, or even readily. Let me provide two stories. Many years ago, when I was Master, Earle Page College, University of New England in Armidale in Norther New South Wales, the Chancellor of the University was a very fine pastoralist; Robert Robertson-Cunningham came from a well-established rural family of the Northern Tablelands. Having gained a First Class Honours degree in Veterinary Science from the University of Sydney he completed his Doctorate at the University of Oxford having been a Rhodes Scholar for New South Wales. He returned to Australia, never to practise as a Veterinary Surgeon, to run the family holdings. A very civic minded person he was soon appointed to the Council of the New England University Council, ultimately becoming Chancellor of the University, thus succeeding two prominent pastoralists Phillip and Peter Wright in that role.

Rob and his wife were great friends of the university colleges and I recall a conversation with him on one of his many visits to Earle Page College, discussing how difficult we find it sometimes to say “Thank You” when someone says something kind to us, or presents us with an unexpected gift. Rob admitted that in his long career in public life it was one of the social graces which he found the most difficult – often feeling embarrassed or inadequate in his response. He was pleased when he realised eventually it was best to simply say “Thank you”, and recognise that for many people there was great joy in the giving!

A few years later when I had returned to be Vice-Warden of my old college at the University of Queensland, I was reminded by the wonderfully holy Father Dunstan McKee, one time superior of the worldwide Anglican religious community, the Society of the Sacred Mission, how it did really make sense to simply utter and truly mean the two words "Thank you". To his mind they should convey all that is needed.

We gather today to say, "Thank you", not so much in different ways but certainly to different people, and of course, as Christians, ultimately to be reminded of our need to say "Thank you" to God and his Son, our Lord Saviour, Jesus Christ.

We commenced our service with a short ceremony in which one of our community has baked and presented on our behalf a loaf of bread. In this ceremony we are reminded of the practice in earlier times when villagers in recognizing their utter dependence on God the Creator and Father for their survival would gather up the earliest ripened wheat seeds, mill them, and bake them into a loaf of bread which was taken to the Church with thanksgiving and joy and for a blessing on the harvest for that year.

As we begin our local harvests, I think it is good as both farm and town people we be reminded that however good our farming abilities, our ever improving farming techniques and the quality of seed, we are ultimately in a dependency relationship with the Creator, and we do well to remember and pray that we might live and work in harmony with God the Creator and his Creation. Might it be that this understanding be also with those with responsibilities for climate change public policy and practice.

After I complete this address, we will have the opportunity to remember before God those members of our communities, who, not only responding to the call to fight against oppression and hatred during international armed conflict, were killed in action. Their names will be said aloud and by doing so let us recall that each of these people belonged to families, were part of communities, and were friends to others; each of them would have been a son, many a brother, cousin, grandson, even fathers and uncles. We give thanks, because they believed in creating a better world, in building up the best form of the Kingdom of God here on earth. They followed in the footsteps

of the invocation of Jesus that no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. They might not have all understood this explicitly; some went for the adventure (believing they would be home by Christmas). The reality is we know we owe them much for their sacrifice, and ultimately the freedom, peace and hope, we experience each and every day.

In our final ceremony we will pray for and give thanks for those more readily known to us; those of our community who have died and been buried or cremated from this Church by means of a Christian funeral. These will be people whom we trust were influences for good and who in their own way endeavoured to uphold and honour the kind of world Jesus declares in The Beatitudes which we said together as our reading between the designated Old Testament and New Testament readings. We will also remember those loved ones, family members or friends, whose influence for the best, rests well with us and to whom we owe so much on our journey of life and Faith.

All of these "Thank you's" can but fill only part of the greatest gift for which we need to say "Thank you" and importantly need to acknowledge and act upon – this is the gracious sacrificial act of love provided for us by Jesus; the one who by dying for us and rising to new life means as St Paul writes to the Romans "We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him" and therefore "being united with Jesus in his death we will certainly be united with him in his resurrection."

For me this is wonderful news of great certainty, hope, and confidence, which allows us, whatever be the foibles and follies of life, to know that through, and with Jesus Christ, we have life and have it abundantly.