

Sermon, 160th Anniversary of the Consecration of St Paul's Church, Edward's Crossing

Sunday, 22nd May, 2022

Readings: 1 Kings 8:22-24, 27-30; Psalm 122, 1 Peter 2:4-10; Matthew 7:24-29

Hymns: Praise to the Lord the Almighty; Glorious things of you are spoken; The Church's one foundation; Now thank we all our God

Many years ago, I attended a marriage service in the Blue Mountains National Park, west of Sydney. Richard, the groom, and Sharnie, the bride, had decided they wished to be married at the place at which they had first professed their deep and abiding love for each other. This special place was atop, and at the end, of a long and deep gorge where marital party, priest, and guests, all made their way, having parked their cars, and walked through a significant length of bushland. Sadly, my abiding memory of this special occasion at this special place, is that it was a marriage solemnised on a freezing cold July Blue Mountains' day, with dark overhead cloud coverage, and a sharp penetrating wind blowing up from the gorge below, making all of us bitterly cold, even those of us who had fortunately and sensibly worn jackets, overcoats, and scarves. I can only assume that on the day Richard and Sharnie first professed their deep and abiding love for each other, it was a warm and sunny day, when this special place would have made for a spectacular backdrop!

During Easter Week I took the opportunity, provided by changed Western Australian Border arrangements, to visit Queensland, and in particular my ninety-two-year mother, and the rest of my immediate family. I had not seen them in person since Christmas 2021, when on my return to Western Australia I had needed to self-isolate, because during my time in Queensland, someone in Queensland had contracted COVID. Arriving at the farming property where my mother lives I opened, what is in effect the "front gate" to our farms, and while the gate that swings there today is a vast improvement on the rather rusty looking gate which swung there for much of my life, I was struck how comfortable, reassuring and uplifting it was to return to this place, which was for so many years my own home. I realised that for this somewhat peripatetic soul, it probably remains so today. It is certainly a place of so many fond memories, even if at that very entrance, my father had been killed in a car accident over forty-two years ago.

This morning we have gathered at a special place, in a building which I trust is important to each of us, if not perhaps more particularly for those with familial connections, or for those who have cared for this place, or for those whose relatives are buried in the graveyard. For some, today might readily be described as marking and making a pilgrimage. For those who were responsible for the building

of this church and surrounding graveyard in 1859, and for the 4th May, 1862 request for its consecration, it was important for them, the Rev'd Fredrick Lynch, Messrs Parker, Fleay, Lennard, Broun and Draper, requesting that the church building "be solemnly and forever set apart from all profane and secular uses and under the name of St Paul be dedicated to the worship of the Ever Blessed Trinity according to the pure and Apostolic ritual of the Church of England and Ireland." They further requested "the consecration of the ground surrounding the Church and enclosed by a fence, as a resting place for the Christian dead until the resurrection of the just." On the 10th May that year the Church and graveyard were consecrated by Bishop Matthew Hale, Bishop of Perth, and it was declared by the Bishop that "It be known unto all Christian men that this Church to be henceforth known by the name of St Paul's Church at Beverley in the Province of Western Australia is now solemnly dedicated to the service of Almighty God and is forever set apart for the celebration of Divine Service and separated from all profane and common uses."

You may have noted that so far in this address, that when referencing place, it is not just the place to which I have referred, but more importantly what the place represented or was about— first, a place in which deep and abiding love had been recognised and ultimately regularised in marriage, and secondly, a place which spoke of all that is good about a home and home life which was fulfilling, comforting and loving, and thirdly a place for the worship of God, always the first call upon humanity.

As those who take an interest in historical matters will know, early colonial settlers upon having established their farms or businesses, were keen to establish a school for the education of their children and a church for worship; and if I may be so bold, and hark back to our Plough Sunday observances, for them such activity spoke of a real understanding of the need in their lives for a relationship with the Divine. Matters of God and matters of Faith mattered. The more I learn of the history of the Avon Valley I am conscious of where not only schools and public halls, tennis courts, etc were once, but also how many little churches were established by a variety of denominations. If a "pub crawl" might be a popular activity, then in times gone by you could have undertaken a "Church crawl," walking from Holy Trinity Church, York, to St Peter's Church, Gilgering, to All Saints' Church, Haisthorpe, to St Paul's Church, Edward's Crossing, to St Mary's Church, Beverley.

Our readings from Holy Scripture speak to the importance of place in the same terms. In the reading from the First Book of Kings, the Ark of the Covenant is finally to have its own home, the Temple. Within, Solomon thanks God for his faithfulness to his people, and while noting the joy of having a

House for the Lord, Solomon recognises that such a place can never contain all that is God. Such an understanding is a healthy reminder to all of us that the work of God, to which we are called, does not take place only in the Church building. Likewise, it is a reminder also that such a place and building is for prayer and worship where we need gather so God can hear our prayers and confessions, both individually, and as a community and as a nation.

St Peter in his First Letter enjoins us to think of ourselves as living, vibrant stones of a place and building, which is actually a spiritual house in which we, as with any other building, are placed to work together, so that we might be the fulfilling of the cornerstone of that spiritual building, the place, the life, which is of course our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thus, we are called to be, and behave as the royal priesthood, holy nation, which proclaims the excellence of this Jesus Christ, who calls us out of darkness into light. I find such imagery and exhortation, endearing yet daunting, but important, as we seek to be the Church of God in this place, 160 years after this building and its graveyard were consecrated.

Our Gospel reading draws all our thoughts together rather well, in what is perhaps a pertinent and contemporary way. It is the exhortation that in being attentive to, and in building up, our Faith we need build it on good foundations, rock. We need to be the wise people who recognise that the very best rock is the person of Jesus, the transfigured, crucified, risen and ascended Christ. It is he who came in humility as an infant, who offered and offers redemption, and who so loved us that he brings reconciliation between humanity and God, that he died on the cross and by so doing overcame its sting, and in rising to life, as our recent Service of the Stations of the Resurrection highlights, appeared to his many followers. He subsequently ascended to be with the Father, and then sent forth the Holy Spirit to be our guide, our power, and our sustenance, as we the Church, living stones and building, go on to minister in the proclamation of all this Good News.

It is for these very reasons that this special place, St Paul's Church, and graveyard, at Edward's Crossing, is so significant. May it and all for which it stands, always call us to be active in the proclamation of the Faith, and the building up of the Kingdom of God, whatever be the weather, cold wet and windy, or stifling hot, as when we met to celebrate the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul in this special place earlier this year in January.