

Jesus, 2020 and the church in crisis...

A reflection about positive change during a time of crisis...

17/5/20

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Let us pray:

O Lord, from whom all good things do come: Grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same: through our Lord Jesus Christ. Who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Amen.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

The continuation of the Holy Gospel taken from John 14: 15 to 21.

Glory be to thee, O Lord.

“Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” (vs 20)

This is the Gospel of Christ.

Glory be to God.

At the tender age of thirty-five I found myself walking into a large reception hall on the sixth floor of some non-descript building in the middle of Goodwood, Cape Town. (I do believe that this same building is now a colourful block of flats) It wasn't just any building or place. It was special. It was to be my home for the next few days. As I entered the entrance hall area, a man whom I

had never met before, stopped what he was doing and asked me for my name. I reservedly told him my name, not too sure what to expect. The next moment, he said out aloud to everyone who was milling around, "Hey everyone, stop what you are doing and let's all welcome Darron!"

I had never received such a warm welcome before in my life.

I had never indeed needed such a warm welcome before in my life.

It felt like home.

Except I wasn't home.

I was a patient in a psychiatric ward.

I was burnt out and I had nowhere else to go.

It was time for change if I was to survive the next half of my life...

There has been much written on the various social media platforms about the current state that the church finds itself in of late due to the Covid-19 crisis and the resultant consequences. An interesting article written by Russel Pollitt SJ, titled, "We must embrace a new & different Church" grapples with the myriad of issues that church management, clergy, laity and parishioners all find themselves dealing with, as the lock down stretches out with no determined end in sight for worship returning to normal. (I will post this article on the church Face Book site for you to read)

The issues that all churches face around the world are indeed challenging, if not slightly overwhelming. It is not new news that the mainline church numbers have been dwindling for many years with the resultant loss of income and fiscal security. What Covid-19 has done is to bring forward the issues that, in many ways; the church has failed to deal with for a long time.

You may be asking what are these issues that have brought about a dwindling growth in many of our churches?

Well, to put it simply, times have changed.

The question that needs to be asked is the following, "Has the modern church kept pace, if not forged ahead, of the Fourth Industrial Revolution?" If the

answer is anything but a resounding, “Yes!” then we need to have a careful rethink of how we view the church in 2020 and for the years to come. Covid-19 will not end when the lock down ends. It is here to stay. It is us who are called to adapt and make the necessary changes if the idea of a “church” is to survive into the future.

Some of the questions that need to be asked are:

- 1) Is our style of worship and community reaching out to the modern generation who are, in essence, the future of the church valid and engaging?
- 2) Do we have a creative and innovative response to the challenges of Covid-19 in terms of restructuring the church and how we worship?
- 3) Do we have a creative and innovative response to the challenges of Covid-19 in terms of how we remain stable financially?
- 4) Do we have a creative and innovative response to the challenges of Covid-19 in terms of how we develop our theology? (We are a sacramental church. How do we understand our theology when we are unable to partake of the Eucharist? Some suggest that an online Eucharist is theologically invalid. Some interesting debates need to be had around these topics)
- 5) Do we have a creative and innovative response to the challenges of Covid-19 in terms of how we carry out our mission of spreading the Gospel and the love of Jesus during these times?

I do not have all the answers.

I do have ideas, as perhaps you do too.

This message this morning is not so much about finding immediate solutions, as opposed to generating a discussion around some of the ideas that we need to be talking about if the church is to survive. And, yes, it’s that serious.

This is a time of crisis.

This is, however, also a perfect time and opportunity for the broad church, to join hands, at all levels and brainstorm how we are all going to move forward. Perhaps the future will see us relying more heavily on non-

stipendiary priests building more home churches. This prevents large gatherings, builds intimacy in relationships and reduces financial overheads massively. This is just one idea. There may be many...

We are reminded in the New Testament how there was no physical church building for many years. Jesus operated his ministry out in the open, preaching the Good News and healing people wherever he went. He was not tied down to physical structures or routine. The traditional church and forms of structured worship, as we know it, came much later.

The Gospel of John reminds us this morning that we are never alone. The Holy Spirit is always with us. In fact, it is good to remind ourselves that the love of God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are indeed bigger than the church we think of and understand. The Holy Spirit can never be trapped and contained by the church. The church and its four walls cannot claim ownership to the Holy Spirit or the love of God. The love of God is both everywhere and eternal. It is bigger than the physical manifestation we like to think of during our church services. Jesus and the Holy Spirit is in us and we are in them, wherever we go and whatever we are doing... these are the things that we need to be thinking about as we move forward with our ideas of how we are going to rebuild the church going into the future.

I am also reminded of a brilliant book written by the theologian Jurgen Moltmann, "The Trinity and the Kingdom of God". Jurgen suggests some interesting ideas about the Holy Spirit that we could put to good use during these challenging times.

Firstly, Jurgen writes that the Spirit is the divine energy of the new creation. This is invaluable for us to remember as we think tank our way forward as a church. We cannot do this without the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We can do this but we cannot do this alone.

Secondly, Jurgen suggests that the eschatological work of the Holy Spirit is physical resurrection, physical transfiguration, and transformation of the physical form of existence. Yes! Read the physical form of the "church" here.

This is what it is all about.

Remember how I started off this message about sharing with you all how I landed up in a psychiatric ward all those years ago burnt out and pretty much rock bottom in my life?

I had two choices.

I could either give up totally or I could choose to rebuild my life.

I chose to rebuild.

You and I now find ourselves in a similar position with the future of our beloved church and how we express our love for Jesus as a community.

We must choose to rebuild, no matter how difficult the challenge is.

We have a wonderful opportunity to build something new, creative and inspiring, filled with the Holy Spirit and growth for all.

Let us, collectively, in a spirit-filled manner, embrace this time as a time of growth, reflection and love, as we seek His will for His church.

May you have a peaceful and restful Sunday

Every blessing

Fr Darron.