

Lent 1.(C)
St Peter's Box Hill
Luke 4:1-15
February 25,2007

THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGING.

Two men walking along the coast near a growing bayside tourist community were expressing concern about the number of drownings that had occurred at that beach over recent years. One man said to the other;" We need a Life Saver's Club to patrol the beach and provide a focus for care and safety."

They called together friends and interested supporters and from that conversation the Point X Life Saver's Club was formed. The following winter the potential Life Savers trained and the local business people and community raised cash for a small club house. With great pride and commitment the Club House was opened by the local M.P. and the club commenced operations. The following summer there were no drownings at Point X, a first aid centre was established at the small club house and the local community felt that something very positive had been achieved. It was true that the clubhouse was too small, but it did have small change rooms, a first aid room and a small lookout to survey the scene. So the Point X Life Saver's Club grew in membership and efficiency. Many lives were saved and many people with cuts, sun- burn and other ailments were patched up in the First Aid Centre.

As the community grew, more and more people came to this safe beach. Some of the newcomers joined the Life Saver's Club.

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Many of them were appalled when they discovered that there was no bar or decent club room; and after a time their agitation led to a new public meeting to build a bigger and more suitable Club Centre.

This caused a shift in emphasis and Point X Life Saver's Club set a target of two million dollars for their new club house. It was eventually opened by the Premier with a debt of \$400000. "But that was minimal among so many members." There were barbecues, dances, raffles, art unions etc to pay of the debt and to pay for the expanded program. Whilst more members joined the club it was noted that attendance at life saver's practise and lessons declined dramatically until the following summer it was only possible to patrol the beach in the afternoons.

Late that summer after several tragic accidents and drownings two members were walking along the beach front. Looking up at the club house which was crammed with people at the disco and four star restaurant, one man said to the other; " You know, what Point X needs is a Life Savers Club." That story or parable is one of the underlying themes of the review in which this parish is at present engaged..

"It is time to give attention to how the church is the church"

These are the opening words from the contemporary book " Building Missionary Congregations" by Robert Warren which raises issues so fundamental to the life of the contemporary church that I intend to use several of its themes as lens to interpret the Lenten Scriptures this morning.

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The fundamental theme of the book is that as a church we are being called upon to make a transition from a church that places its primary focus upon its membership to one that finds its agenda in the needs of the community.

There is a widespread recognition that we need to discover some new ways of being

church. But how?

(1)FACING CHANGE

"The times they are a changing." is my theme this morning. Those words from the lyric by Peter , Paul and Mary belong to a past generation yet have renewed power today.

We are living through a time of unprecedented change which seems to accelerate at new and sometimes frightening speed. We may not like this change but we certainly cannot avoid it. This reality has profound implications for our Church... We can no longer respond to the heat of contemporary society by seeking to promote Coolgardie safes; nor by responding with the answers to yesterday's questions. As Anglicans we do belong to a church with a rich and valued tradition. However for many that tradition has become frozen, fixed and static rather than fluid, lifegiving and dynamic.

(2) FROM PASTORAL TO MISSIONARY.

We are faced with a fundamental change in our way of being church.

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The Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops in 1988 identified this change or shift in the following way.

"In many parts of the world, Anglicans have emphasised the pastoral model of ministry at the expense of mission. We believe that the Holy Spirit is now leading us to become a movement for mission."

Lambeth Report,1988:13. pp327.

Such a statement defines the church in two contrasting ways - **pastoral and the missionary.**

The pastoral mode of being church is the one that Anglicans have inherited from our past. It is based on the view that we minister in a setting where the majority of the population are really Christian and where our main task is to nurture and shepherd the faithful. The State was there to defend and protect the Christian values that permeate society. Such a view was a myth even fifty years ago and is now a dangerous deception which many Christians still believe. It can lead to a church whose primary purpose is the satisfaction of those within its walls.

The mission mode" is in contrast set within a culture of competing value systems and world views that exist alongside each other. A world which commentators call "post modern" without the absolutes and certainties of the past; a culture which is based on individualism rather than communal values and which is absorbed with the present.

It is obvious that this is our setting at this time of history. A society that is not so much hostile as indifferent to local church communities like St Peter's.

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This lies at heart of the despair that some clergy and churches experience today. Their agenda has become;"How can we survive?" not realising that this is the path to death.

It is also obvious that the culture and context we face today must shape the agenda and direction of local Christian communities as well as our communion. The mission mode emphasises the necessity of rediscovering images of ministry such as "the fisher " as well as that of "the shepherd."

This does not mean abandoning the pastoral focus of the past but rather interpreting it in the light of the missionary setting in which we minister today.

Well how are we to make this transition? What are its implications for this community?

Primarily it is about a change of focus and agenda as a Christian community rather than finding a blueprint for the future. In this setting blueprints are the voice of the false prophets, for this is a time for journeying rather than detailed maps. Like the parable with which I began this address we need to focus afresh upon our primary purpose.

(3) **SIGNPOSTS FOR THE JOURNEY**

It is in this context that the gospel account of the temptations of Jesus speaks with such insight and power to our journey today.

The Church like Jesus will be tested, - tempted to take detours which may on the surface appear more comfortable but will turn out to be dead ends.

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The tests or temptations of Jesus, speak directly and persuasively to the style of ministry and mission he was to fulfil.. They follow directly after his baptism and awareness of his identity and mission. The gospel reading indicates that he spent forty days seeking to focus upon the direction of his mission, and the temptation scene raises some significant questions about the identity and mission of Jesus. Jesus is famished and the tempter suggests to him that he make bread from the stones of the desert. It is a logical step to perceive that as a way of influencing and winning the support of people. Should he bribe his first century audiences by treating them as less than human - bodies to be fed.?

Or should he take the alternative route of expecting people to be more than human.- -to be pure spirit. For that is the meaning of the temptation to jump from the pinnacle of the temple.

As we look for a sense of direction to our future we face tests that are equally fundamental to our mission. There are many conflicting voices that would urge the church to resist change, that is the way of contemporary fundamentalism; there are other voices which would advocate that we ignore change and seek to conserve an ecclesiastical museum from the past, remote from the present and with no hope for the future; and there are other voices who would wish to ultimately compromise with the spirit of the age.

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The temptations or tests of Jesus provide some vital clues for a Church seeking to identify its mission and ministry today.

What is the change to which we are called? Warren provides a vivid image when he writes;

"The church is called to move out of the guard's van, where we are looking back over the distant and disappearing peaks we have passed (or desperately clutching the brake to slow down the pace of change at every point). We are to get out of the guard's van, recover our nerve, and rediscover our true role in the vanguard of society, shaping the new world order in and after the likeness of Christ. Not by means of imperial imposition - the abuse of power-, but rather by becoming the first sign of what we preach."

This task has implications for each one of us. In our expectations of the role of our Parish Priest, and in the direction we take as a parish community. There are some

positive signs already in this parish. Our ministry with the Sudanese community. Our small beginning of the Easter Journey and the recognition of the need to make new Christians. The opening up of our church building. These are all .positive starts. During this Lent we all have the opportunity to share in the Consultation in which the Vestry is engaged in shaping new directions and strategies for our parish life. This morning after this sermon we have the first of three opportunities to respond to several questions concerning our worship, service and community life. Yes we do face a transition as a church that is a little scary as well as exciting." The times they are a changing" and we need discernment to understand which things should remain, the courage to change those things which need to change and wisdom to know the difference.

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I hope that we can use this Lent to engage in a similar process within this parish. To take time to listen, to people outside the community of the church, to our fellow parishioners and above all else to God.

Jesus rebuffed each of the false detours or temptations with the word of Scripture - words of great promise to us today.

"One does not live by bread alone". but as one of the other gospel recalls " by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

God grant that we may hear and respond to that word as we seek to live and witness to signs of the mission of Jesus today.

It would be tragic if someone should say; " You know we need a Church in Box Hill"