

1 September 2022 – Synod Sermon

Helen Robinson – CEO and City Missioner - Manutaki, Auckland City Mission

St Mary's-in-Holy Trinity, Auckland

Well, what an honour it is to be here tonight, with you.

I do need to let you know that Bishop Ross asked me before last year's Synod, if I would be willing. I cannot tell you the relief I felt, or perhaps the sadness I felt when I learnt that due to our old friend COVID we could not gather as we do tonight, and I was off the hook. Tonight, there is no more escape, my time has come. It is such a privilege to be here. To share this journey – haerenga, with you. Certainly, a privilege for me in own person, and a privilege to stand here as Missioner – the Manutaki of the Auckland City Mission. I am the 10th in the line, the first of course been Jasper Calder 102 years ago. I had the occasion to meet Bishop Bruce Gilberd a week or two ago and he told me that he knew Jasper – and has met now each Missioner since. Our rich whakapapa deeply connected and intertwined, to St Matt's in the City which of course now resides next to us, leads us, of course to here. This place, this communion, to you. We, I belong to you – and you of course belong to me. Together we are a we. Those bonds that travel across time, and place and history. Invisible yet very very real

In the bonds of the invisible but very real, I want to consciously bring into the room Bishop Jim White. A couple of years ago, when he was very sick, but still present in the land of the living, I came with Sr Chris Farrelly to the opening of the Synod that year to support Jim and Chris and to hear him preach. I sat where you are now, certainly not knowing what was to come for me. But more importantly not knowing what was to come for Jim. The present-day Mission, owes so much to him, so much because of him. I have read recently that he was on our Board for 17 years, I have not checked yet if that was literally correct, I suspect it is accurate. His last years as Chair and the one to lead us in the brave and uncertain territory of daring to believe miracles such as what HomeGround has become, might just be possible. We have one room named in HomeGround after a person – and it is after him, our Board Room is named. I go, innocently to book in a meeting in one of our rooms – and his name, the Bishop Jim White Board room pops up on the calendar on my computer. He is present. Present always as our faith teaches us, even in death. Present certainly at the Mission and definitely in the bricks and mortar of HomeGround. And present through these words and in this spirit, tonight. Pīhopa – I acknowledge and honour your presence. E te Rangitira, moe mai, moe mai moe mai ra.

It is an honour for me to be here tonight, in your presence, part of this communion, part of the lineage of years past, called now into the present, into this presence. Your presence, and it is a special occasion for which we gather. A coming together, people of faith, in faith, seeking communion, and through that communion, igniting, or perhaps re igniting a flame – the flame that can be called by so many words, passion, truth, justice, righteousness – seeking a clarity for a way forward, a clarity for a way of being, a clarity for the here and now. A clarity of presence. Again, again, and again, we hear that call, to the presence, the present, the context of the here and now, for us, for our time, in this place. Now.

Preparing for today, I was moved by tonight's readings. Close your eyes and listen to this.

Does wisdom not call out?

Does not understanding raise her voice?

At the highest point along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand;

Beside the gate leading into the city, at the entrance, she cries aloud:

“To you, O people, I call out;

I raise my voice to all of human kind...

And then to the first reading, again, listen to this, close your eyes if it helps as I read. Particularly after hearing the first reading and how we are reminded how wisdom cries aloud.

Do you not know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your midst?..for God's temple is sacred, and you together, we together are that temple.

Now, you will have heard tonight, in that second reading, talk of building and foundations and the promise that those foundations will be revealed by fire. It was only months ago, literally on the 24th of December, that I held the symbolic key to the door for HomeGround – the culmination of a 15 year journey, the courage, the guts, the passion, the compassion, the faith, the vision, the hope, the generosity, the uncertainty, the fragility, the precariousness, the loss, the pain, the division, the healing, the coming together, the harnessing of a city and at times even a country, to build this building. Tonight, I am resolutely NOT going to talk to you about fires revealing the truth of foundations!! Rather, tonight, discerning the call of that wisdom, I want to read to you those words from Corinthians again

Do you not know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in your midst?..for God's temple is sacred, and you together, are that temple.

Oh how we run from that truth. How we hide, cover up, pretend, avoid, dismiss, reject and rebuke – the sanctity of each of us, the sanctity of each other, the sanctity of ourselves. A people, a country, a community deep in the dis ease and thus living with the disease of this denial. And yet, at the call of Wisdom, here we return, to this truth. This wisdom. God's temple is sacred, and together, we are that temple.

Quite a challenge laid out to a group of us who gather in communion, seeking clarity for a way forward, a clarity for a way of being, a clarity for the here and now. We are the that temple. The temple of God.

It never ceases to amaze me that that together, really does mean each of one of us, together. Our partners, and children, our parents, our families and friends. Those of a different gender, or colour, or size or shape, a different sexuality, ethnicity, age, ability. Those who look different, who are different. Those pleasant and unpleasant. The suffering and unsuffering alike. Those who ill, and disfigured and ill tempered. Those who behave badly, those who are drunk, and drugged and yes those who are homeless. Those who do not 'deserve' communion, or who are seemingly unworthy, they, or perhaps I should say, 'we', all of us, the we, together we make up this communion, this temple.

So listen now to these words, written by someone in our Anglican communion,

Within God's good gift of creation, humanity, is made in God's image. This gives all human beings a dignity that cannot be taken away. And this, "Whenever we face another, we see a reflection of God's infinite love and glory. And this, "Hospitality to all and faithfulness to each other are marks of a godly community. " Words you may recognise from Archbishop Justin Welby himself, on the call to human dignity from the most recent Lambeth Council.

Over and over again, over and over again Wisdom calls from the top of the hill, at the city's gates and says, see me, SEE me, see ME. Here and now. SEE ME.

And how, when we see, there really is no escape. There really is no choice. There is only a time to respond. And that time is of course, the present, the here and the now.

Many of you will be aware that HomeGround is now a reality. It is the most beautiful of buildings, 11 stories, 80 apartments, 2 floors of detox – 25 beds, a large medical centre, a medical centre, conference facilities, commercial kitchens, community rooms, a rooftop garden. It is a beautiful building – worthy of awards. In fact, we won the property council awards a couple of weeks ago – literally determined as the best for the year. And, if you pause and go below a layer, below the wood and steel and concrete, or within them perhaps, it is not hard to see the courage, the generosity, the hard work, you see the footprint and the handprint of so many – including the Anglican communion who made this possible.

And below the beauty and the generosity, or perhaps within it, you see the faith, and the trust and the hope. You see the dream of a place where all people are welcome. Where dignity, for all, the dignity given to all human beings, and cannot be taken away, the realisation of that dignity, for the so called least amongst us - is made possible. It is made real. It is realised.

Part of the story of HomeGround takes us to a meeting, in October of 2017, just over 5 years ago, the Mission Board, led by Bishop Jim, gathered to meet in the crypt of St Matts. There was no space in the Mission for some reason, and for some reason they went next door to the Crypt. To the place, the very particular, specific place, where Jasper Calder himself gathered over a hundred years ago with a group of people, discussing the need for the Mission. The birthplace of it all. Back to 2017, they had the building contract literally in front of them to sign. They had 37 million of the 90 they needed. And they signed that contract. With a consensus. Some will argue that they shouldn't have.

Moved, intrigued, wondering, I asked Chris – well Sir Chris, the previous Missioner why did they do so? And the response? Helen, we could see. To a person in the room we could see. See the poverty, see the destitution, see the homelessness, see the death, see the hunger. See the unnecessary illness. See the impact of colonisation, see the desperation see it raw and real and in front of us. See it the people. Visceral, real, embodied. And from that seeking there really is no choice. Something must be done. And importantly, something can be done. And so the next birth of the Mission occurred.

And in so doing, justice prevailed. HomeGround is a building, but its so much more. Its an act of Justice.

Or perhaps to put it differently, it is a temple. A temple of God, made up of, by and for the people.

In the biblical fire, the fire I refused to acknowledge above, it is a fire which to survive, requires faith, and tenacity, and courage, a willingness to let go, to trust, it requires generosity, and a together ness, rarely seen, but often longed for. Through the fire, the Mission was built. The Truth has been revealed. The temple has been built.

And that is the real story of HomeGround. Not the building. But what happens inside, and Breathtakingly so.

So now at the top of the hill, Queen Street on one side, Victoria Park on the other, at the gates to the city, Hear Wisdom as she calls.

HomeGround. A home for all.