



ORDINATION SERVICE ADDRESS

Methodist Conference 2018

Christchurch

Te Haahi Weteriana O Aotearoa

Ordination Service Address

Sunday 30 September 2018

St Andrews College, Christchurch

Colossians 3:12 – 17

John 21:15 – 19

Let us pray

Loving God, you call your people in every age and generation to be your servants. We pray, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and the longing of our hearts, by the words of the scriptures and in the thoughts we form. Speak, O Lord, and enlighten us so that we may serve you faithfully. Amen.

If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority. – Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr stated this 50 plus years ago. I find these words are still relevant half a century later. As followers of Jesus Christ, we have to constantly rethink our way of being church. We have to understand the difference between a social club and a church. In other words, we have to ask ourselves, is our church an irrelevant social club or a church with a prophetic zeal?

I don't have to explain what a social club means, or rather an irrelevant social club. Walk into some of the church services, you will find this. Alternately, how can we be a meaningful church with a prophetic zeal? That is the challenge I wish to place before us.

Tisileli, Sikeli, Lopiseni and Arapera, you are being ordained to ministry in the church today. I want to address two questions to you. (1) What will be the shape of your ministry? (2) Why are you committing yourselves to the ordained ministry? I hope you have discerned the call that the Spirit of God has prompted in you to be servants in this sacred role. I wish to underscore, we become servants for the Lord not

because of our desire, or because of the status and privilege we will have. We become servants because Christ Jesus chose us to be the servants.

Look at Jesus' instruction to his disciples in John 15: [16] **You did not choose me but I chose you.**

The scripture is clear that for one to be a minister be it a layperson or ordained, Jesus Christ chooses a person. After 30 years since my own ordination, I say this with a strong affirmation. Jesus told his disciples: You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit. Jesus chooses us with a purpose. That is to go and bear fruit. What sort of fruit are we expected to bear?

You were trained, tested, and prepared adequately for this day. Now the question is, how will you transform what you have learnt, what you have been trained for into action so that our church will recapture its prophetic zeal? For some of us, the temptation is like what Dr Jenny Te Paa said in her lecture at *Fale Pasifika*: "... little princelings being raised as ministers, who yearn only to be kings. To be served and not to serve. To be feted like emperors at the top table and to have all women, especially their wives, know unquestioningly their (falsely alleged) biblically-mandated, subservient place."

This is not the purpose of Jesus in choosing his disciples. The model we have to look up to is Jesus Christ himself. One who came not to be served, but to serve. Rev Tovia's message to the ordination service 2016 was "You have been called not to be served but to serve." Tovia very clearly stated, "We are ordaining you to service, not to status."

The model we are following in our ministries is one who did not conform to the aristocrat's religion of the day and associate with the priestly hierarchy, instead walked with the ordinary people on the streets and beaches, who spoke truth to the power of his day. As a result a movement was born. And the movement maintained its prophetic zeal.

How is it today? I come across instances very often where the Jesus movement is stagnant inside the four walls of what is now called church. This notion was challenged globally.

With over 1200 participants, the conference on World Mission and Evangelism that met in Arusha, Tanzania in March this year, released a statement to the churches around the world named the **Arusha Call to Discipleship**. It stated:

“Discipleship is both a gift and a calling to be active collaborators with God for the transforming of the world (1Thessalonians 3:2). In what the church’s early theologians called “*theosis*” or deification, we share God’s grace by sharing God’s mission. This journey of discipleship leads us to share and live out God’s love in Jesus Christ by seeking justice and peace in ways that are different from the world (John 14:27). Thus, we are responding to Jesus’ call to follow him from the margins of our world (Luke 4:16-19). As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively: We are called by our baptism to transforming discipleship: a Christ-connected way of life in a world where many face despair, rejection, loneliness, and worthlessness.”

I find that the call to Jesus’ disciples of first century is resonated in this call of Arusha in 2018. It is a call to a transforming discipleship. Unless we as church be agents of transformation, we will be an irrelevant social club.

Jesus did not chose friends to be with him and to run a social club. Instead, he chose them and appointed them to go and bear fruit. Christ’s choice of his servants has a purpose. That is to go and bear fruit. How do you go and bear fruit?

Look at a tree. First, a tree has to be alive; it needs its roots on the ground. Its branches have to be connected to the tree. That alone is not enough. The tree needs water and fertilizer. All that is important for the tree to bear fruit. So is the teaching of Jesus Christ in John 15.

[4] Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. [5] I am the vine you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

Abiding in Christ is very important to bear fruit. For some ministers, abiding in Christ means the time they spend in the theological institution as nourishment. After the training and ordination, they develop an attitude that they are now fully equipped for the ministry and that they are above all other training. You know that kind. Consequently, they do not bear fruit or they are detached from the tree. For your ministries to be effective and to bear much fruit you need to abide in Christ constantly.

Friends, you who are getting ordained today, and those who are ordained already, and those who are baptized as disciples of Christ, remember to abide in Christ to bear fruit that is acceptable to the one who called you. Among all professions, Christ's ministry is the most difficult one. That is because we are not operating machines to produce something, but building God's kingdom with moral and spiritual authority. We are called to care for and tend the lives of those who are given to our care.

That brings me to the instruction Jesus gave Simon Peter after the resurrection. "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." Jesus said it three times: Feed my sheep – Tend my sheep – Feed my sheep.

A shepherd has the duty to feed and tend his sheep. What does that mean? Dictionaries explain the word 'Tend' as manage, watch, supervise, and watch over.

We who are ordained to be the ministers have the responsibility of a shepherd to feed our sheep with spiritual food. It is our duty to nourish the faith of the people who are entrusted to our care. If we ourselves don't have the nourishment from Jesus Christ himself, how can we nourish others in our care? Therefore, abiding in Christ is important to nourish ourselves to tend Jesus' sheep. How do we do?

A shepherd has to watch over the sheep to protect them from danger, manage them by taking them to the field to feed and then take them back to the shed. Supervise them so that they will not get lost. Jesus gave these models to his disciples to follow. That is the fruit we are expected to bear. Jesus did not give one model of ministry, but many.

There is no single form of ministry but diverse ministries. Each kind of ministry arises out of where we are sent and what the Spirit of God prompts us to do to serve Christ. That means we have to abide in Christ to discern what he wants us to do.

Let me share an experience of discerning what the Spirit of God prompts to do. During my visit to Solomon Islands as overseas mission director in 2016, the medical superintendent at Helena Goldie Hospital in Munda asked me “Can you help us with building an infectious disease ward because we are admitting patients with malaria and pneumonia into general ward. Other patients are getting the cross infection.” My answer was, I cannot promise anything, but I will see what we can do. Right along my return journey, this was troubling me in my thoughts. I kept praying. After my return to Auckland, I shared my heavy heart with the synod. Lynne Frith, the superintendent of Auckland Central parish came to me during the tea break and said; Pitt Street church will celebrate its 150th anniversary in October. We will take this up as our anniversary project to fundraise for the building. In my understanding, this is how God works miracles. The parish raised the funds; the ward was built. On 25 April 2018, I was there with three members of the parish that funded the building to open it and dedicate it to God’s mission. That was a miracle.

When God puts you in a context with a challenge, look for the guidance of the Spirit by abiding in Christ. God will show the way to complete the work. In ministry miracles happen not by praying alone but by working to make the miracle happen.

In conclusion, I want to draw your attention to the assuring words of St Paul to the Colossians 3: [12] As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. [15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. [17] **And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.**

May God bless your ministry. Work to rebuild a church that bears fruit with a prophetic zeal to care for God’s people. Amen.