

2025 Perth Synod Eucharist – ABM's 175th Anniversary.

Sermon – The Rev'd Canon Stephen Daughtry

May I speak in the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, Companion. Amen.

Firstly, let me express the delight I feel in being invited to be here with you, and my gratitude to Archbishop Kay for that invitation. My delight and my gratitude are genuine. It's an honour to be with you and to have this opportunity to explore something of the Mission of God.

Might I also express my deep feelings of imposter syndrome. Many of you may be wondering why you're listening to a very ordinary priest from Adelaide, rather than a world-renowned theologian from....somewhere else. Maybe anywhere else. I'm not sure how you feel about Adelaide. Nice place. You have a couple of our best over here. But it's not in WA.

If you're wondering along those lines, don't worry. So have I.

The answer lies in the fact that next Wednesday, the Anglican Board of Mission – Australia, celebrates 175 years of existence. 175 years of trying to discern what God is doing and seeking to join in. 175 years of glorious successes – and abject failures. Of cultural arrogance and humble repentance. Of fabulous friendships and holy revelations. 175 years of learning. 175 years of partnering with the Anglican Church in Australia as we have – together – sought to draw all people into the realisation that God's unbounded love in Christ Jesus – in all its mystery and beauty and joy and complexity – is the source of the personal and communal healing of all things.

I am a small part of the ABM story. I'm an ABM storyteller. I started work for ABM in 1999 and I'm still here, because I believe in what we do. Passionately. And in what God is doing. Passionately. And your Archbishop has honoured ABM by allowing us to participate with you tonight.

And what better place to talk about mission, than to a group of people about to enter into the maelstrom of Synod? Synod, where our ministry and theology and friendships are tested in the refining fire. Where abstract questions can become deeply personal. A forum in which we are called to seek the good of the church, that it may better serve God's world. A place of good intentions and contested wording, of passionate

disagreements and heartfelt apologies, of scintillating financial reports and far too few jokes – or is that just my experience?

You see, the grand expression of mission, as articulated in the Five Marks of Mission, does not just apply in the big picture. It has to be at work – as you all know – in the small picture. In the day-to-day expressions of faith in life that you and I are part of through most hours of most days.

Mission is relational. It is grounded in love of one another, unfettered and generous.

Mission is incarnational. It is founded on the acceptance that the Spirit of God dwells within us and accompanies us as we seek to follow Jesus.

And mission is ordinary. It is commonplace. It is what we are about in our families and friendships, our homes and workplaces, our schools and universities, our chaplaincies, our parishes, our dioceses, our lives. Because, once joined to the church of God, our lives simply are....missional.

Which is to say that, after 175 years, ABM recognises that we are just a small part of the great work God is doing through all of us. And that we want to both thank you – for the support you have given the work of mission that we undertake – and honour you – for the large part of mission that you undertake. We are Partners – and I hope friends – in the ongoing work of the Great Commission.

We heard again, in the Gospel reading, the command and encouragement of Jesus, *‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.’*

A daunting and inspiring task. One made, perhaps, more potent and palatable at this ferocious and frightening time in history when we combine it with the words of Isaiah, *‘How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news’.*

When we reframe the task of making disciples as the task of invitationally including people in a holy movement that draws its strength from the Prince of Peace, and whose task it is to continually spread Good News, we are talking about something truly wonderful.

Good News. News that, *'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.'* The great news that death has been defeated. That love is stronger than death. The mind-bending news that there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. The incredible, culture-breaking, family disrupting, heart-freeing news that, *'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.'*

The great, inclusive, radical, welcoming identity of the family of God.

And as with all families, we have some shared family values that help us to remember who we are and why we exist.

At ABM – and across the Anglican Communion - we call these values, the Five Marks of Mission. The following are the ABM versions.

And with each of the Marks of Mission I will open a little window from my own experience of seeing these values expressed in the life of the church.

1. Witness to Christ's saving, forgiving and reconciling love for all people

Some years ago, I was in Zambia, visiting a church project in a slum area. Inside a gated and much abused property, I met with a group of HIV positive women – and one young man – to whom the church had reached out and provided a safe and supportive space. A place where they were valued as God's children. A place where they were being trained in skills that would allow them to make a living in their community. Their stories were heartbreaking – but their sense of being loved and of emerging hope was breathtaking. They were already people of battered faith, but the love and acceptance of the church through this work that we Partnered in, witnessed to them of God's acceptance and reconciling love. Witness is – so often – much more than words.

2. Build welcoming, transforming communities of faith

When visiting the Aboriginal community at Numbulwar, I had the great privilege of meeting YULKI NUNGGUMAJBARR, the first Aboriginal, Anglican, female priest. At that time, Yulki was a powerful leader, a respected elder, a master weaver and a shining light of God's love in her community. We went fishing together and she gave me some baskets she'd made. But it was at night that she showed me why she

was there. We walked into the dark of the community at night and came to the place where she was running a prayer and worship meeting. Across a vacant block there were numerous campfires, all surrounded by groups of women and men who were there to worship and praise God in their own language and with a deep sense of cultural integrity. I still remember it as one of – if not the most – incredible experiences of Anglican Church worship I have ever attended. She had – with her community – built a welcoming, transforming community of faith that was right at the heart of her community and meeting a genuine need.

3. Stand in solidarity with the poor and needy

I have just returned from Sri Lanka, where a new Partnership, based on providing education for the children of tea pluckers is developing between the Anglican Church of Ceylon and the Anglican Church of Australia – through ABM. The children we hope to assist are trapped in a cycle of poverty that stems back to their ancestors being forced into indentured labour in the tea plantations. It might be easy to say, better late than never, but this is a deliberate step by the Church of Ceylon to stand with the poor and needy – and bring healing and reconciliation. I can hardly express how exciting it is to be part of the emergence of yet another Anglican initiative that responds to God's call for justice.

4. Challenge violence, injustice and oppression, and work for peace and reconciliation

Each year we call out to the church in Australia to support the work of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem. Throughout the Gaza war, the Al Ahli Arab Hospital – an Anglican hospital – has operated in Gaza, despite being hit by numerous attacks. Today they continue that work. Our Anglican brothers and sisters. Its doors have remained always open to anyone in need of care – regardless of race or creed. In the West Bank and in the State of Israel, Archbishop Hosam and his clergy and people are a constant, quiet, resolute, good-humoured beacon of peace in one of the most troubled parts of the world.

5. Protect, care for and renew life on our planet

ABM's recent Season of Creation Appeal highlighted the work of Anglican Church of Melanesia in steps to combat Climate Change in the Pacific Islands. There is nothing theoretical about this work. Many of the island communities are existentially threatened. Here the church is

working with science, with faith , with culture and with hope, bringing to people an understanding of what is happening and empowering people to take action. They are vocal on the international stage, weaving together scientific facts and theological understanding at the cutting edge of Creation Care. They are seeing the world as God's precious and beloved gift, as Psalm 104 reminded us of tonight.

These are the Anglican Marks of Mission.

These are the values we live by and through which we follow Jesus.

These are stories of our church. Not of someone else. This is us.

And the work you are doing is just as exciting and relevant. You'd be amazed at how interested fellow Anglicans are in what is happening here.

I have very little to offer you tonight except perhaps, this. A reframing of what ABM is and can be to you.

We are not an external mission agency. We are not a poster on the wall or an email asking for funds.

We are – like you – the church. We are a friend in mission who can connect you to fellow Anglicans across the world who are doing things that will make you proud, people and communities you might like to join in with. Fellow Anglicans who want to hear your stories so they too can feel proud to be part of this odd, broken and beautiful thing that is the Anglican Communion.

It may be true that we, the Anglican Church, are not as shiny or slick or unified as we once were, but over 26 years, I have seen mission act as a bridge between great divides, simply due to the fact that *acting together brings people together* for a cause greater than our differences.

That cause is the mission of God. To heal and reconcile all things. To invite all people into the family of God. To love and respect and repair the created order.

As you go from here to your Synod deliberations, may you go with a deep sense that you are part of something wonderful. Something that matters. Something that is both Holy and unfinished.

May you go with the spirit of generosity that St Paul called from the Corinthian Church.

May you go proudly and fearlessly, knowing that you are deeply loved members of that deeply loved part of God's mission to the world that we call the Anglican Church of Australia.

Peace be with you. Peace go with you. May peace meet you on the road.

In the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**