

**The Installation of Canon Dr Jeffrey Gibson as Dean
February 21, 2016**

Jer 1: 9 - Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, 'Now I have put my words in your mouth'.

The Bible never seems to lose the opportunity to compare and contrast human frailty with the grace and power of God. Whether it is the creation story that places the limitations of Adam and Eve alongside the gracious forgiving power of God, or the call of the writer of Revelation to the Christians of Asia Minor to move away from their unchristian practices and embrace in its totality the way of the Lamb, there is the comparison and the contrast.

This comparison is present in both of our readings this evening. In the reading from Jeremiah, that tells of his call, that is, his venture into a new area, and indeed a new level of ministry, the themes of reluctance, the fear of the unknown and the fear, most of all, of the mammoth task he is being called to undertake, all stand alongside the power of the word of God.

Jeremiah protests this somewhat impossible task of confronting his people with a message that will lead them to reflect on themselves and to redirect their lives. The task is overwhelming and he is not afraid to search for a way out:

Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

But in spite of all the challenges that seem to be present, and all that may arise in the future, as one who is called to lead others along the way to God he is equipped for the journey.

This is a conviction that runs throughout the Bible. It is one that has been embraced by the Church. She calls persons to be leaders on this

journey and affirms the conviction of God's support along the way, a conviction that is captured in the words from the call of Jeremiah:

I have put my words in your mouth

It is this theme of assurance that is also present in the reading from Romans chapter 6:3-14. Here St. Paul speaks about death and life, contrasting the two experiences, to put over his point about the fresh start that is the Christian faith that is symbolized by baptism.

He claims:

Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life

Ministry according to the story of the call of Jeremiah and the Christian life according to St. Paul in Rom 6, reflects these contrasting experiences of life and is expected to stay connected to the abiding presence of God.

This presence is not power to exclude the difficulties, but the grace to face them with conviction. It is the assurance reflected in the ministry of Jeremiah and that of St. Paul, the assurance that with the grace of God, challenges can be met and difficulties managed.

And surely this was the message of Jesus. He preached and lived a message that declared that God is ever present and pays special attention to those things that we may not easily connect to him, and treat as experiences of his goodness. Things like the feeding of the birds and the care of the grass.

This understanding of God is one that relates well to what we are doing this evening. It provides for us a foundation upon which we build ministry within the Church and in the wider community.

As we install Dean Jeffrey as Dean of this Cathedral Church, in the

context of the Anglican presence in this island that has offered this island more than three hundred and fifty years of Christian work and witness, as we do so in this bustling city of Bridgetown, we are installing him into a ministry that like that of Jeremiah and St. Paul, is built on the assurance of God's presence.

But this assurance is not only in what we proclaim but what we do to impact lives and help them to experience God at work through his Church. It also sends us as it sent Jesus to meet people where they are and respond to their condition, and bring the Gospel alive for them.

This Cathedral has the awesome responsibility of making the Gospel come alive in this city. It has the responsibility of making those Gospel connections to the experiences in this city that will hold them up against the demands of the Gospel.

Your ministry, Dean Jeffrey, as Dean of this Cathedral Church must be one that enhances the connection between the Cathedral and the city community. And there are several ways this can be done.

Many of the excellent models of ministry you exercised at St. Leonard will be useful here at the Cathedral. But just ensure that at all times they are able to affirm God's presence and concern in relation to the issues that this Church is called to address.

In each case it will be the critical issue of affirming the connection between the ministry of this Cathedral and life in this city. This affirmation can of course take several forms.

It starts with the conviction that within our sphere of ministry as individuals, as a parish, there are no exclusive zones or no-go areas in relation to the proclamation of the Gospel. As in the ministry of Jesus everyone falls within the network of the Good News.

It is this this understanding of what it means to proclaim the Good News that forms the bedrock of our ministry as Anglicans, and is

captured in the First mark of Mission. It is an understanding that must be treated as the bedrock of the ministry of this Cathedral.

When this is the case our ministry within the walls of the Church and the ministry without are two complimentary expressions of proclaiming the Good News. They become an indication that like Jeremiah, we have accepted the responsibility that comes when God has entrusted his word to us.

This is, first of all, the responsibility to keep the way of God and the things of God as priority. This is not a pious abstraction but a call to ensure that we make some effort to keep the way of goodness and righteousness before our community. These will stand as the high points to which we are journeying.

There will always be the struggle to maintain this way in the face of the many alternatives that are offered to us. But let us connect the experiences of goodness and righteousness to life in a manner that can identify the type of ministry this Cathedral Church has to this city, to its members and indeed, to this country.

Our ministry must be people oriented. Any institution can at times place the priority on structure and tradition instead of people. We are a very structured Church with glorious ancient traditions. A cathedral is the place where these traditions are expected to exist in pristine form.

We have rules and regulations for many things. In this diocese we conduct our business under the legal umbrella of the Anglican Church Act.

All this is good. It takes very seriously St. Paul's advice given to the congregation at Corinth in I Cor.14:40, that

....all things should be done decently and in order...

In his context there could have been a slide into individualism fuelled by the claims of some persons to be prophets. This was a claim that

could easily lead to personal aggrandizement. It could have created chaos within the congregation.

St. Paul's sane advice is to remember the rules and respect the traditions. But he surely did not stop there. After teaching them in I Cor.13 that there is a measure of freedom that is guided by love, he begins ch.14 with the admonition:

Make love your aim....

and so when he concludes in vs.40 that

....all things should be done decently and in order...

It is to be understood that the motivating guiding force behind all that was done in the congregation was to be love.

A people oriented ministry is one that is able to maintain the balance between the glorious qualities of love as set out in I Cor.13 and affirmed in ch.14:1, and the call for order and structure in 14:40. We have to be constantly at work to ensure that this balance is kept in place.

For if we skip the advice of I Cor. 13 about love, and become stuck on the side of 14:40 that is about order and tradition, then our ministry can be robbed of that humane compassionate, caring touch that can help persons experience the love of God that ought to be at work in his Church and in our lives.

Our model of a people oriented ministry is of course the ministry of Jesus. In each of the Gospel, there is a story that tells of Jesus going beyond the restrictions of traditions to be an experience of God's love for someone who really needed it, for someone who fell outside of the tradition.

It could be his outreach to the centurion with the sick servant in Mat 8:5-13, , or to the Syrophoenician woman with the sick daughter in St. Mark 7:25-30, or to Zacchaeus the despised tax collector in St. Luke

19:1-10 or the woman with the complicated unconventional life at the well in St. John 4:1-42.

In each case we are taught that in the ministry of Jesus, people were central. His was a truly people oriented ministry. Dean Jeffrey, let this be the type of ministry that marks your stint as Dean of this Cathedral.

If this is so, you will reflect a special concern for the vulnerable. As a spiritual oasis in this city with its many vulnerable persons, the Cathedral should be a place where all who feel battered by the storms of life can come and be reassured of God's love.

Let this Cathedral be a place where all who join you here in worship will be drawn into an experience that affirms them as children of God. Let it be a place that welcomes, not one that excludes. Let it be an experience of the all-embracing love of God.

As a people oriented congregation that never allows the tradition to get in the way of a warm Christian welcome, the ministry of Cathedral can be an example of how the tradition itself, whether music or ritual can be a vehicle that conveys the message that our God of glory reaches out and embrace each of us, no matter who we are, no matter what is our condition in life.

This is the type of connection to this city and the people who are in it that the Cathedral needs to strengthen. It is one that will make an important point that was at the very heart of the ministry of Jesus.

It is one that says in word and deed even as Jesus did, that we are not in the business of protecting God from the rough edges of life and society, but we are here to share his love with all, especially with those who need words of assurance in their lives.

For above all else, this Cathedral should be the source of uplifting experiences for all who worship here or who are touched by its ministry in some other way. There should be the type of experiences that lead

them to reflect on their lives, to reflect on the goodness of God.

There is a sense in which ministry here at the Cathedral should be different from that in other parishes. But it is only different in terms of the intensity that should be here in relation to the ministry in the diocese.

At this time, as we focus on our Strategic Plan, I expect the Cathedral to play a leading role in its implementation. You must be the leader in terms of the ministry of the diocese, a leader in terms of the vision and the push forward to improve and strengthen our mission and ministry,

In many parts of the Anglican Communion, Cathedrals are far more than Parish Churches. Indeed, in many cases, there are not Parish Churches. They encompass and indeed offer a range of ministries that emphasize the connection of the Gospel to the issues of the city in which they are situated and so they help to sharpen the ministry of the diocese.

My hope is that we in this Province will one day enhance our Cathedrals in this way. We will then be able to transform them into the focal point of the ministry of the diocese that they ought to be.

We however thank God for the ministry our Cathedral has offered to this city and this country as the mother Church of the diocese during the past one hundred and ninety-two years, and as a Church in the city for more than two hundred and twenty years.

As we continue to offer a ministry here that is spiritually uplifting and enlightening, we ask for your prayers and continuing support. We will continue our work of restoration, and we appeal for your assistance in this very important venture.

As we install Dean Jeffrey this evening, we do so with confidence that he will continue the great and noble tradition of ministry that is associated with this Cathedral.

Never forget Dean to keep in a delicate balance those two strands of

ministry that are spelt out for us by St. Paul in I Cor.13 and I Cor. 14:1in terms of all the many experiences of love, and in I Cor. 14:40 in terms of the order and dignity that should mark our ministry.

Remember at all times the call of Jeremiah. At sometimes like him, you may think the task is overwhelming. But let the reassuring words of our text be your guide and inspiration:

‘Now I have put my words in your mouth’

In other words, ‘You are enfolded with my power and presence. So you can press on’.

Press on with the conviction that these words, that is, the grace of God will be at your disposal as you exercise your ministry as Dean. There will be many challenges along the way but with the abundant grace of God you will I am sure overcome and manage them in your calm, collective, decisive way.

We pray that you and Rose, together with Leah and Joel will have a fulfilling ministry here at the Cathedral. I have no doubt that you will be one of our Deans who will so shaped and present, and indeed, represent the ministry here, that you will become synonymous with efforts made to strengthen the ministry in our Cathedral parish, and in the wider diocese.

I leave you with the words of our text:

***Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth;
and the LORD said to me, ‘Now I have put my words in your
mouth’.***