

SERMON at ORDINATION of BISHOPS
MISSIONER BISHOPS in the IMAGINE PROJECT
CHRIS JONES & ROSS NICHOLSON

St David's Cathedral Hobart 26 February 2008

Sermon by Bishop John Harrower

Readings: Peter & Jesus in John 21:15-19

Hymn of the early Church about Jesus Christ in Colossians 1:15-20

Could Peter's mother ever have imagined that Peter would speak to the Messiah?

Peter was a fisherman not a rabbi.

Could Peter's fellow disciples ever have imagined he would write the following words:

“¹Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you ²to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it.” (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Who could ever have imagined that the impetuous and strong willed fisherman would write that?

Could Chris Jones' mother ever have imagined that Chris would be ordained a bishop?

Chris grew up in the northern suburbs and worked in banking.

Could we ever have imagined that he would be ordained a bishop?

Could Ross Nicholson's mother ever have imagined that he would be ordained a bishop?

Ross Nicholson comes out of the advertising industry and is a base player (and played in a band called 'Sheep Dip')!

Could we ever have imagined that he would be ordained a bishop?

Imagine the grace of God in your own life.

Can God do abundantly far more than all you ask and imagine?

YES! God can.

God can do abundantly far more than all we ask and imagine.

**Chris and Ross, help us to imagine God;
help us to imagine God who can do far more than all we can ask or
imagine.**

**Help us to imagine and to build a Tasmania that is far more than all we
can ask or imagine.**

This is my heart. - This is God's heart.

“Well”, you may respond, “That’s a bold statement, Bishop?”

Yes, it is a bold statement.

**I am bold in imagining God who does abundantly far more than all we
can ask or imagine.**

Why can I imagine this? - Because this is what God does.

**God is in the business of doing abundantly far more than all we ask or
imagine.**

**Do you recall the strong willed and tempestuous disciple,
the fisherman, Peter?**

Apart from Jesus Christ,

no other name occurs as often in the Gospel accounts, as Peter's.

No disciple speaks so often, as Peter.

No disciple is spoken to so often by Jesus, as Peter.

No disciple is as reprimanded by Jesus, as Peter.

No disciple seeks to reprimand Jesus, -except Peter.

**No other disciple so boldly confessed and outspokenly acknowledged
Jesus, as Peter.**

No one intruded and interfered in Jesus' ministry, as Peter.

No other disciple is encouraged and blessed by Jesus, as Peter.

No other disciple is reprimanded and warned by Jesus, as Peter.

Peter, the rock - so called by Jesus, was often more like flaky sand!

**Do you remember the incident when Peter wonderfully exclaims,
“You are the Messiah [the Christ], the son of the living God.”?**

Mt 16;16

And Jesus responds, “Blessed are you Peter” Mt 16;17

**Yet, within moments, Peter is rebuking Jesus,
seeking to interfere in Jesus’ ministry:**

“God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” Mt 16;22

And Jesus responds to Peter,

“Get behind me, Satan.

You are a stumbling block to me;

**for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human
things.”** Mt 16;23

Do you recall other forceful exchanges between Jesus and Peter?

“Lord, I will lay down my life for you!” Jn 13:36-38

– “Peter, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times”.

In astonishment at Jesus’ power in the miraculous catch of fish,

Peter cries out, –

“Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” Luke 5:8

Peter is head-strong, impatient, impetuous, confrontational, speaking rashly, ready to repent, jumping in to waters too deep for him.

And then turning again to his Master like a little child.

Remember how Peter felt hurt because Jesus said to him the third time,

“Do you love me?”

And Peter replied to Jesus,

“Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jn 21:17

Peter's three fold affirmation:

“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

corresponds to the three times that Peter denied knowing Jesus.

How painful, yet how healing.

The pain of becoming all that God intends us to be,

is a hard transforming work;

a deep surgical work of the Holy Spirit.

But the result is a healthy body:

a healthy church . . . transforming life.

And this transforming life, came to Peter.

Do you recall when Peter stood up in Solomon's Porch in Jerusalem,

to preach that powerful Pentecost sermon,

“repent and be baptized, every one of you,

in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 2;38

While Peter and the disciples had waited and prayed for the promised Holy Spirit, it was Peter who stood up and proposed that they should replace Judas Iscariot and reconstitute the twelve by selecting one of those who had been a companion with them and the Lord Jesus.

Could Matthias ever have imagined that he would be called to be one of the apostles?

**Matthias was called to be an apostle,
to share in the mission of witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

Matthias was a faithful apostle, faithful to his call, even to death.

Matthias, like Peter, had met Jesus.

There is no other like Jesus - Jesus is supreme.

Listen again to this great hymn of the early Church: Colossians 1:15-20

¹⁵He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” NRSV

As I have prayed and imagined this day, and especially for Ross and Chris, not forgetting Jenny and Chris and their families, I have asked myself again and again just exactly what is the special role and responsibility of the bishop in the community of faith, the Church?

This event this evening is an Ordination service for Bishops.

The ordination as bishops of Ross and Chris.

Ross and Chris have been called by God to serve as Missioner bishops.

Bishops are commissioned, as were Peter and Matthias,

to witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ

and to go make disciples of all nations in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This ordination, this evening, deepens our commitment to our mission; to building a healthy church . . . transforming life.

What sort of Tasmania can you imagine?

I have been on the ordination retreat with Chris and Ross since Sunday.

In our time together we imagined a Tasmania where a people

- **step between division and bring unity;**
- **confront injustice and strive for fairness; and**
- **sacrifice to serve.**

A Tasmania where there is –

- **love, justice, compassion and opportunity**
- **reconciliation with the aboriginal community**
- **wise stewardship of our natural resources**
- **work for all**
- **nobody living on the edge of poverty**
- **where housing is affordable for all Tasmanians**

We imagine a healthy church transforming life

because God has placed it on our hearts.

***Chris and Ross, help us to imagine God.**

God who can and will do abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.

***Chris, Ross, I call on you to make this imagining a reality.**

***People of God, I call on you to join them.**

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

BIBLE READINGS from NRSV translation

Jesus and Peter - John 21:15-17

¹⁵When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter,

“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.” ¹⁶A second time he said to him,

“Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷He said to him the third time,

“Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. ¹⁸Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” ¹⁹(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

The Supremacy of Christ - Colossians 1:15-20

¹⁵He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.