

David Jones' Farewell Sermon
St Thomas' Port Macquarie
9:00am 20th January 2008

Happy New Year! What does this new year hold for you?

This is my last time in the pulpit as your rector. It is hard for me to say goodbye. I have been sad for a while knowing I was leaving all of you, but it hits me at certain moments in particular. Last Thursday I had my last walk. Gretta and my sister Nancie and I walked along the coast at Smoky Cape. As I said goodbye to my sister afterwards I suddenly felt very sad.

I have invested nearly 8 years of my life into this church of St Thomas' and now it is at an end. Today I say farewell and you say farewell.

I take the opportunity now to thank you wonderful people. May God continue to shower you with His blessings. I am thrilled that you are a prayerful and loving people. The highlight of my week has always started on Saturdays at 5 and gone on to Sunday mornings when we have met together around the Scriptures and the Lord's Supper. And most important of all, God has met with us.

God led me here to you. Nearly eight years I came across from Perth for the interview with St Thomas' nominators, Syd Hopkins and Gary Boyd, and the bishop and others. We flew up to Grafton from here in a small aircraft. Coming back at night, after the interview we flew through a storm. It was quite dramatic. Syd and I did a lot of talking to keep our minds off it! Then we came out of the huge dark clouds into a crystal clear night sky with the lights of Kempsey below us, SW Rocks over on the left and Port Macquarie ahead. I sensed God was saying that as rector of Port Macquarie there would be storms, but we would come through to God's place of peace and beauty.

I sensed the going may be difficult to start with but the plane experience was a picture for me of a very positive outcome. And so it has proved.

I believe it is important to say goodbye well, to grieve openly and in a healthy way, to leave you properly. I am pleased that the Bishop is involved and will help you through this transition time too. Last year Bishop Keith Slater completed his post graduate degree in Transitional Ministry. He has seen the need to get the process right when a rector leaves a parish in Wauchope, or Alstonville, or Grafton or Sawtell. When your bishop comes here in three weeks time to St Thomas' you will find he wants to be involved in the whole process of transition, and his input will help you towards letting go of the last 7 or 8 years with me, looking again at who and what you are at the moment before considering and looking forward to the future.

Thinking about the future can be exciting. I am very excited about the possibilities of ministry and life in my future, yet before we can do this it helps to let go of the past. A lot of my teaching during the past 7 years has been to do with grief, and forgiveness, and letting go of the past. I sensed God wanted you to understand about letting go before you can move on. And in the past 6 months, since I have known I was leaving, I have worked hard to make sure my time of saying 'Goodbye' to you would be effective.

I love you all, and you are a very special people of God. Unique - and He has purposes, wonderful purposes for you all; but these plans and purposes will only emerge slowly as you seek Him and as you seek Him together. His plans are actually not that mysterious. They are certainly not hidden. The Scriptures reveal them.

We come to church primarily to be refreshed by God's Spirit as we look again to our heavenly Father, and approach Him as His dependent children. You and I are naturally insecure. We are fragile. We look for security. We need reassurance of one kind or another. I'm a person who gets reassurance from touch. I often give Gretta a hug or a kiss. Its nice for her, and its reassuring for me. When we come before God at these worship services, we want to say things to Him, in order for him to reassure us of his love. The Holy Communion service re-enacts the last Supper and the death of Jesus, to remind us of where our confidence is.

When he saw Jesus, John the Baptist said, "**Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.**"

I believe Christians have a great advantage in their journey through life, because Christians acknowledge the existence of evil. We admit that we are sinners. "**The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked**" the Bible tells us.

We're not keen on the idea, that we are sinners, and most of the week we act as though we have got it all together. You are actually three different people; or rather you live in three different worlds; or perhaps I can say it this way, you can be characterized from three different angles: what you have, what you show, and what you believe you have.

i.e. Firstly: What you actually have, what you are really like; Secondly: what you show others about yourself, that part you are prepared to reveal; and thirdly: what you think you are like.

A great difficulty confronts God. He desires to help us. He attempts to reveal Himself to you and me, so he can save us. The difficulty God faces is that He has to cut through the dreadful tangle of dishonesty and lying self-deception and pathetic make-believe with which we at all times surround ourselves.

It would not be so bad if we only pretended to others, but alas! We are all the time pretending to ourselves as well. And so we need outside help. We need a deliverer, a Saviour. It is helpful when we find encouragement from each other and can share our struggles. How does Jesus help you each day?

Last week Jim Holbech preached on John the Baptist and how all the people went out to be baptized in the river, as they confessed their sins. When Jesus arrived by the river to be baptized, John says, **"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"** (John 1:29).

By calling Jesus the Lamb of God John was thinking of the lambs that were sacrificed in the temple for the sins of the people. From cover to cover the Scriptures tell the story of how a holy God, a holy heavenly Father, can deal with the heart of the human problem, which is the problem of the human heart. Jeremiah calls the human heart desperately wicked. By nature we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. By turning again to Jesus Christ we come back to our true centre.

Yet God loves us and wants to rescue us from this naturally lost condition. The world thinks that being wealthy and respectable and successful is enough. Even religious people can think that. The Pharisees thought that. But God insists on changing us from the inside out. When a person makes the decision to turn to Jesus and trust him they begin a new journey that lasts for ever. Our regular meeting together for Prayer and praise, for scripture and the Lord's Supper help us along the way.

I have asked three people to share briefly with you how Jesus helps them along the path. Clive Reeve and Bill Ashcroft are members of the 8:00am congregation and they will be followed by my wife, Gretta, who has come weekly to T@5 since it started three years ago.