

## **ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS HOMILY – PSC – 29 SEPTEMBER 2022**

### **READINGS: JOB 38;1-7, PSALM 148;1-6, MATTHEW 18;1-10**

MAY WE PAY ATTENTION AND SEE HEAVEN OPENED AND THE ANGELS OF GOD ASCENDING AND DESCENDING ON THIS PROVINCIAL STANDING COMMITTEE. MAY GOD GIVE US HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT AS I SPEAK TO YOU IN THE NAME OF GOD WHO IS OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER AND SUSTAINER. AMEN.

**HOLY MOTHER CHURCH** CELEBRATES TODAY A SPECIAL FEAST IN HONOUR OF THE THREE ARCHANGELS NAMED IN THE HOLY BIBLE, ST MICHAEL, ST RAPHAEL AND ST GABRIEL.

**HOLY MOTHER CHURCH** WE ARE SEEKING TO RE-IMAGINE GOD’S CHURCH IN GOD’S WORLD

**HOLY MOTHER CHURCH** CELEBRATES THIS MONTH, THE ORDINATION OF THE FIRST WOMEN AS PRIESTS IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

ON 15 AUGUST 1992, AT THE PROVINCIAL SYNOD HELD IN SWAZILAND, THE RESOLUTION WAS EVENTUALLY PASSED TO ALLOW THE CHURCH OF THE PROVINCE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA TO ORDAIN WOMEN TO THE PRIESTHOOD **AND** EPISCOPATE. THE PROPOSER WAS DEAN COLIN JONES, SECONDED BY MAUREEN SITHOLE. THERE WAS A 24 HOUR PRAYER VIGIL BEFORE THE DAY WHEN THE MOTION WAS TO BE PUT TO THE VOTE. ARCHBISHOP TUTU WAS THE PRESIDER OF THE SYNOD.

IT TOOK US TWENTY YEARS TO ORDAIN THE FIRST WOMAN BISHOP. ARCHBISHOP THABO CONSECRATED ELLINAH WAMAKOYA, OF BLESSED MEMORY, IN NOVEMBER 2012 AND I FOLLOWED IN JANUARY 2013. AT THE RECENT LAMBETH CONFERENCE THERE WERE 650 BISHOPS FROM 165 COUNTRIES, ONLY 96 WOMEN! IN ACSA WE HAVE 25 DIOCESES, ONLY THREE OF WHICH HAVE WOMEN AS THEIR BISHOPS.

ON 5 SEPTEMBER 1992 NANCY CHARTON, BRIDE DICKSON AND SU GROVES WERE ORDAINED IN THE DIOCESE OF GRAHAMSTOWN BY BISHOP DAVID RUSSELL.

THE EXCITEMENT WAS MOUNTING FOR THE NEXT ORDINATION THAT WAS TO TAKE PLACE ON A TUESDAY NIGHT, **MICHAELMAS**, IN THE CATHEDRAL OF ST GEORGE THE MARTYR, CAPE TOWN, WHEN THE LATE ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU ORDAINED WILMA JAKOBSEN AND MYSELF. THE HEAVENS OPENED ON THAT DAY. IT WAS RAINING, WITH NO ROOM LEFT INSIDE, PEOPLE DID NOT MIND TO STAND OUTSIDE TO BE PART OF THIS HAPPENING. THE BELLS WERE PEALING, THE ANGELS IN HEAVEN WERE CHEERING US ON, THE CATHEDRAL WAS DECKED WITH DANCING ARUM LILIES. IT WAS 30 YEARS AGO ON THIS DAY WHEN ARCHBISHOP TUTU WAS SURROUNDED BY ABOUT 80 PRIESTS WHEN HE PLACED HIS HANDS ON OUR HEADS. THE FULL CONGREGATION ROSE AND SPONTANEOUSLY APPLAUDED WITH JOY.

DR DENISE ACKERMANN PREACHED A POWERFUL SERMON, WITH HER THEME BEING THAT IT WAS A TIME TO LAMENT, A TIME TO HOPE. SHE SAID ‘THAT THE FACE OF THE CHURCH WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN. THE CHURCH HAS FREED ITSELF FROM PATRIARCHAL BONDAGE.’ OUR ORDINATION WAS A SIGN OF HOPE FOR THE CHURCH AND THE COUNTRY.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND FOLLOWED AFRICA WHEN THEY ORDAINED THEIR FIRST WOMAN AS A PRIEST IN BRISTOL CATHEDRAL ON 12 MARCH 1994 AND THE FIRST WOMAN CONSECRATED BISHOP WAS ON 26 JANUARY 2015 IN YORK MINSTER.

I QUOTE WORDS FROM ARCHDEACON CHERYL UREN SPOKEN AT FALSE BAY DIOCESAN CHAPTER LAST WEEK WHEN WE GAVE THANKS FOR THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN:

'STRIKE THE BEAT UPON THE DRUM FOR OUR PIONEER WOMEN. BLOW YOUR HORN O AFRICA FOR YOUR DAUGHTERS! WE SALUTE YOU'.

THE VERY NAME OF MICHAEL MEANS 'WHO IS LIKE GOD?' THIS IS A CHALLENGING QUESTION? THE NAME GABRIEL MEANS 'THE STRENGTH OF GOD' AND RAPHAEL MEANS 'GOD HAS HEALED'.

CAN WE THEN AS THE PEOPLE GATHERED AT THIS PSC IMITATE THEM? NOT ONE OF US IS HERE BY ACCIDENT. WE ARE HERE AS GOD'S MESSENGERS, APPOINTED BY GOD, ANOINTED BY GOD. WE ARE HERE AS HIS JUNIOR PARTNERS TO TRANSGURE THE WORLD GOD ENVISIONED, TO RE-IMAGINE ACSA.

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT READING, THE LORD ANSWERS JOB FROM WITHIN THE STORM CLOUDS. GOD DOESN'T ANSWER JOB'S QUESTIONS BUT SAYS 'I WILL QUESTION YOU' IN SO DOING, GOD BROADENS JOB'S VISION.

GOD SAYS TO JOB, WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I FOUNDED THE EARTH?

GOD SAYS TO US, WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I FOUNDED THE EARTH? WHO IS LIKE GOD? I KNEW YOU BEFORE YOU WERE EVEN BORN. YOU HAVE ALWAYS BEEN HELD IN THE HEART OF GOD.

FRIENDS, GATHERED HERE IN PSC, MAY WE BRING OUR QUESTIONS ABOUT WOMEN'S ORDINATION, ABOUT CELEBRATING MEMBERS WHO ARE MARGINALISED, WHO SUFFER BECAUSE OF 'MAN MADE' BARRIERS, INTO GOD'S PRESENCE. IT REMAINS A TIME OF 'LAMENT AND HOPE'. LET US PSYCHOLOGICALLY, SPIRITUALLY, THEOLOGICALLY, PRAYERFULLY, SCRIPTURALLY, ETHICALLY DEAL WITH COMPLEXITY IN ALL ITS FORMS. MY PRAYER IS THAT LIKE JOB WE WILL BE SET FREE, THAT WE WILL ENTER INTO JOY AND BE TRANSFORMED THROUGH OUR QUESTIONING. LIKE JOB, LET US LISTEN UP FOR THE VOICE OF GOD AMIDST THE MANY VOICES CLAMOURING FOR OUR ATTENTION. OURS **CAN AND OUGHT TO** BE A CHURCH THAT IS TRULY INCLUSIVE, TRULY REPRESENTATIVE AND DOES NOT OPPRESS OR DISCRIMINATE ON THE LINES OF GENDER, RACISM, SEXISM, CLASSISM.

LET US WALK TOGETHER, SPEAK HEALING AND HOPE IN OUR BROKEN WORLD AND GENTLY HOLD ON TO EACH OTHER. IN THE WORDS OF THE BISHOP OF PRETORIA REGARDING HUMAN SEXUALITY 'WE SHALL KEEP WALKING UNTIL WE ARE AT PEACE WITH THE MATTER AND AT PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER.'

IN MY OWN DIOCESE, THE RELATIVELY YOUNG DIOCESE OF FALSE BAY, TODAY, I GIVE THANKS FOR THE LATE BISHOP MERWYN CASTLE, WHO DESPITE HIS OWN VULNERABILITY AS A GAY BISHOP, TOOK A RISK AND APPOINTED ME AS ONE OF THE FIRST RECTORS, ARCHDEACONS, CANONS, VICAR GENERAL AND SENIOR PRIEST IN ACSA, WHO HAPPENS TO BE A WOMAN. BY SO DOING HE WAS SENDING A CLEAR MESSAGE THAT GENDER IS NO LONGER A BARRIER. IN A SENSE, HE WAS THEN ALREADY A VISIONARY IN RE-IMAGINING ACSA

AFTER THIRTY YEARS OF THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN, THERE ARE STILL INADEQUACIES, WOUNDS THAT WE HAVE TO HEAL, SO THAT THERE CAN BE JUSTICE FOR ALL, FREEDOM FOR ALL, EQUALITY FOR ALL. GENUINE, AUTHENTIC INCLUSIVITY NEEDS TO REPLACE EXCLUSIVITY IN MANY WAYS. IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO START, IF WE ARE SINCERE ABOUT RE-IMAGINING ACSA.

TODAY'S GOSPEL INVITES US TO **HUMBLE** OURSELVES AND NOT **HUMILIATE** ANYONE. MEN AND WOMEN COMPLIMENT ONE ANOTHER IN MINISTRY. WE ARE **EQUAL** PARTNERS. WE DO NOT **COMPETE** WITH ONE ANOTHER. WE ARE TO **MUTUALLY SUPPORT AND RESPECT** ONE ANOTHER IN DEED AND IN WORD. SADLY, OUR **PUBLIC LANGUAGE** DOES NOT ALWAYS REFLECT 'INCLUSIVENESS'

LANGUAGE SHOULD REFLECT SOCIAL AND CULTURAL REALITIES. WE CANNOT BE SINGING 'RISE UP, O MEN OF GOD.'

WE CAN EACH ANSWER FOR OUR OWN DIOCESE, WHETHER WE ARE EQUALLY GIVING WOMEN AND MEN A HAND UP; IS OUR CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP BALANCED OR AT LEAST HAVE A THIRD OF ITS ARCHDEACONS AND CANONS AS CLERGY WHO ARE WOMEN. ALONGSIDE OUR MALE COUNTERPARTS, WOMEN CLERGY AND LAITY BRING VARIED GIFTS AND SKILLS TO THE TABLE. IN OUR PEWS PEOPLE ARE STILL CONFUSED AS TO HOW THEY ARE TO ADDRESS WOMEN CLERGY. PROGRESS WITH USING INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN OUR LITURGIES AND CONVERSATIONS IS PAINFULLY SLOW. AND EVEN MORE PAINFUL WHEN REGARDED AS A JOKE.

OUR CHALLENGES ARE LARGELY BASED ON TOXIC PATRIARCHY AND CONSERVATISM, SOMETIMES EVEN UNCONSCIOUSLY.

IMMENSE GRATITUDE TO MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE RECOGNISED THAT THEY HAVE TO CHANGE THEIR BEHAVIOUR AND BECOME PART OF THE SOLUTION TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, TO BRING AN END TO UNJUST SOCIAL STRUCTURES.

WHEN WE CO-OPERATE WITH GOD AND THE ANGELS, THINGS CHANGE. IN THE BIBLE WE SEE ANGELS BRINGING GOD'S MESSAGES, FIGHTING EVIL AND HELPING PEOPLE. WE CAN CULTIVATE THEIR SPIRIT OF LOYALTY TO GOD AND GOODNESS TO PEOPLE. LET US LEARN FROM THE ANGELS HOW TO BE IN THE SERVICE OF GOD AND GOD'S PEOPLE. QUOTING ARCHBISHOP TUTU 'WE ARE AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION THAT GOD USES TO TRANSFIGURE GOD'S WORLD.'

LIKE THE ANGELS, LET US DO GOD'S BIDDING, FULFIL THE MISSION ENTRUSTED TO US, AND BRING PEACE, COMFORT, RESTORATION, TRANSFORMATION, HEALING AND GOD'S LOVE TO THOSE WITH WHOM WE LIVE AND WORK AND INTERACT.

IN RE-IMAGINING ACSA IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO BEAR IN MIND THAT EQUALITY IS ESSENTIAL TO HUMAN LIFE AND WELLBEING, IT CALLS US TO GO BEYOND MERE EQUALITY. OUR LATE ARCHBISHOP TUTU IN HIS BOOK 'GOD HAS A DREAM' WROTE 'AN EQUAL YOU CAN ACKNOWLEDGE ONCE AND THEN FOREVER IGNORE.'

IN THIS PSC LET US RELY ON GOD'S VISION, UNDERSTANDING AND ACTION. THE TIME IS NOW FOR US TO BECOME MORE SENSITIVE TO THE POVERTY AND ALL THE BARRIERS EXISTING WITHIN US AND BECOME MORE SEEING AND HEARING OF GOSPEL VALUES. GOD RELIES ON US TO RE-IMAGINE ACSA AND MAKE THIS THE WORLD HE DREAMT OF.

'STRIKE THE BEAT UPON THE DRUM FOR OUR PIONEER WOMEN. BLOW YOUR HORN O AFRICA FOR YOUR DAUGHTERS.'

**GOD, OUR HEAVENLY PARENT, HELP US TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE MESSENGERS YOU SEND US, BOTH THOSE WHO ARE EASILY RECOGNIZED AND THOSE WHO MAY NOT BE SO OBVIOUS – AND TO HEED THE MESSAGE YOU SEND US. AMEN**