

ADDRESS by Reverend Ian Lambert

Chairman of Batemans Bay Combined Churches – 30 Mar 08

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, I think of Peter's words at the transfiguration, when he said "Lord it's good to be here" we thank you for your presence with us and now as we share around your word, may your spirit illuminate in us, your truth, that we might know more of your love and purpose in our lives as the church in Bateman's Bay. AMEN

By way of introduction I want to briefly share with you a question that once challenged me: "**What are the THREE scriptures that are informing your life?**"

We know from 2Tim 3:16 'all scripture is inspired by God and useful for **teaching** for **reproof**, for **correction** and for **the training in righteousness**.

- But what are **the scriptures that currently give you vision , traction**, for your Life under God ?
- What are the scriptures that **draw you onward and upward** on the journey of faith
- What are the scriptures that you are **quoting to yourself regularly that are becoming the touchstones for how you desire to be traveling spiritually?**

For me, at this point of my spiritual journey, the scriptures that are informing my life are:

1. Jn 10:10 I have come that you may have life, and have abundantly.

I speak this scripture into my life, so I do not become satisfied with the mediocre. I find that that the devil will often attempt to steal away my confidence and my joy. Keeping this scripture about abundant life **in my phylactery** can change the colour of my day because it reminds me of the kind of life of Christ died to give me, this side of the Jordan and not just when I die.

2. Also from John 19:30 Jesus on the cross says "**it is finished!**" to me this is important, because like many church leaders, I can fall into the pitfall of thinking that I am more important than I am. And I assume responsibility for the things that are not mind to worry about. Such thinking, in its most dramatic form, is referred to as the messiah complex ... but Jesus words on the cross, **it is finished** remind me that the work is done, so I ought not stress, I don't have to save the world, and I ought to take the responsibility upon myself for the things I have no control or responsibility for. When I remind myself **that it is finished** I hope to receive in return, a sense of peace and joy in living, for a weight is lifted, because I know that there is

- someone more able,
- someone who knows all things,
- someone whose love is endless,
- and some one in whom grace and mercy abounds,

that this person is in control! It is not up to me. Thank God! It is finished!

3. My last scripture that informs my life is from Paul's writing to the Ephesians 3:20 **that God is able to work within me, abundantly far more than I can ask or imagine.** Now if ever there was a scripture to encourage me to live the life of faith, seeking the God of the impossible to be manifest in and through me, then this is that scripture. That God is able to do far more than I ask or imagine, informs me that my God is too small - and that I should continue to strive in faith for the promises of God as laid out his scripture, leaning not on my own understanding, but leaning on him who watches over my going out and my comings in.

I don't share the scriptures with you, to impress you ... I am very much a work in progress, my darling wife can testify to that. But I do pray that these scriptures will inform my life - they encourage me to strive for better, for more, the deeper, for greater, for purer

..... and so I leave with you, as individuals, that same challenge that was set me **What are the three scriptures that can inform your life!**

I want to move from the personal, to the corporate. Taking the challenge that I have just outlined, let us ask the question of the church - the church here in Bateman's Bay.

- What would be the three scriptures that inform the life of **the church** in Bateman's Bay?
- What would be the three scriptures that would call us onward and upward for the purposes of God in this place?
- What would be the three scriptures that would inspire the Churches Together, that would keep us on task, and even hold us accountable?

Maybe you would permit me to share some thoughts.

1. **1 PT 2:9 YOU ARE A CHOSEN PEOPLE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, GOD'S OWN PEOPLE**

Our mission and ministry in this town, begins with us knowing who we are and whose we are! We must first see ourselves as He sees us. We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation we are God's own people. God chose Israel to be His covenant people. He selected them out of the nations of the world. In Christ, the church is God's chosen community to reach the world. And so the Church in Batemans Bay is God's instrument to reach BBay.

God wanted you to be part of His work. God has a great destiny for your life. Out of the billions of people, you are special to God - picked for mission and ministry in Batemans Bay. The plans God has for your life are great plans. He expects your life to produce 30,60 or 100 fold.

We are ROYALTY - because Christ is our king and we are in him, therefore we are royal. And with royalty, comes special privileges and responsibilities. We are not called to be idle, but to work in reaching the harvest for Christ. We have special access to God, not just for us to do our own bidding, but for the benefit of those around us. It is as if we have a backstage pass.

At a recent live concert in Canberra, two my daughters, had the equivalent of a backstage pass. There were there for the sound check, all the informal conversations, and hilarity between the performers, they listened to a jam session, and then their rehearsal, and finally got to speak and ask questions of important people.

We have a backstage pass to our God in heaven. And we have to use this privileged access to bring others to the foot of the throne.

We are called to RE-PRESENT Christ, that is a priestly function. We are to represent Christ to the lost. We are to be a reflection of His love, grace and mercy to those we meet, who are as yet, without Christ.

We are chosen, called to be Holy, called out to be a blessing. We are the ecclesia – **the called out ones**. In that sense we are Peculiar People–this isn't a call or a licence to be strange or weird. What makes us peculiar is we live a spiritual life in a carnal world. We have spiritual dreams and goals, not just fleshly pursuits.

A good rule on being peculiar is: if you turn people off or repel people from Christ, you are just plain strange. If you draw people to God, your life is salt and light in this world, your difference is a good difference.

As a **holy people** we are to be instruments of blessing and sanctification ... under the old covenant holiness meant to be set aside for special purposes – kept separate, in order that the object be contaminated by its surroundings.

But in the New Testament, Jesus the holy one of God, redefines holiness for he touches the unclean and cleanses them, touches the sick and defiled and heals them.

That too is our call, as HOLY PEOPLE of a holy God, part of our mission is to reach out and touch, be instruments of blessing and sanctification.

1Peter 2:9 - four descriptors of you and me as church - chosen, Royal, holy, God's own. If we get this into us, **whose we are**, and **who we are**, we have the foundation for being **the** church in Batemans Bay.

2. JN 17:21 THAT THEY MAY BE ONE AS WE ARE ONE

This informs the life of the church in Batemans Bay, obviously in the area of unity. But I want us to note, when and where Jesus is saying this. This is his final prayer, it's the prayer immediately before his arrest, and he chooses to use this precious time with his father, to pray for unity among the believers.

The time and place of this prayer demonstrates that the desire of Jesus' heart for us as the church, as the disciples, the followers of Jesus, is to be one as the father and the son are one. And the reason for this unity, is not so much for us OR for our benefit, but as it says later in v.21, **that they may believe you sent me**. Our unity is all to do with the world believing.

Disunity, faction fighting does not encourage others to join or even explore the Christian faith.

The key to us being drawn into unity, is each of us having Christ as the centre of our lives - and nothing else. That Christ be more dear to us than our doctrines or praxis.

Picture the church as a large spoked-wheel, with Christ at the hub, then if each individual church, positioned on each of the spokes of the wheel, strived to draw near to Christ, then indeed we would be drawing closer together. As we draw closer to Christ - so we would be drawing closer together.

So then, what is it that unites us ? It is definitely not our doctrines, dogmas or praxis or even, alas, our reading of scripture. No, what I see that unites us is our identity in God through Christ. This is the basis of our unity:

- we are children of God
- We were separated from him by sin and destined for hell.
- But were saved through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross.
- And have eternal life with him through faith.
- We are one in Him through his death and resurrection and symbolized through baptism

That is the basis of our unity! Paul reminds us in Ephesians: There is one body, and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all" (Eph. 4:4–6).

So what then do we say of our denominations?

I would say, denominations are inevitable for two reasons? STYLE and TRUTH.

(i) STYLE - Henry Ford, much to his chagrin, was to discover that the same colour size and shape doesn't suit everybody in the cars. His favourite model T. Ford, had only a limited life before the consumer demanded a choice. And we are all different - having different needs, communicating in different ways, and so styles of worship and naturally going to be different. We need to encourage people to discover what style of worship enables them to connect with God. Most thinking people within the church, recognize this and show grace towards their brothers and sisters in Christ, even though their style of worship, makes them uncomfortable.

(ii) But second reason why denominations are inevitable, TRUTH, is far more confronting 1Cor 11:19 **Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine.**" King James: **for there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved, may be made manifest.**"

Picture this:

we get out the front here a member from each denomination, each of the has a large box full of puzzle pieces for 4 separate puzzles. But they're all mixed up. Using their own pieces, each of these people attempt to contribute to the completion of the four large jigsaws.

One is to entitled the Truth about **worship**,

One is to entitled the Truth about the **doctrines of the church**,

One is to entitled the Truth about **understanding of scripture**,

and another is entitled the Truth about **Christian Lifestyle**.

As the people from the churches work to put these puzzles together, they discover

- that some of **their own** pieces that they wanted to contribute for the worship jigsaw don't fit, and
- some of their pieces that were to go into the jigsaw about the understanding scripture, don't fit.
- they discover they don't have all the pieces themselves, for any one of the puzzles.
- They discover they need each other to complete the puzzles of truth about **worship, doctrine, scripture, and life-style**.
- This suggests for me that our quest for truth can only be achieved together. That our quest for Jesus (THE TRUTH) can only be achieved together for together WE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST, I don't think the Baptists alone make up the body of Christ in Batemans Bay, nor do the COC's or the Anglicans . Together, we are the body of Christ!

But this togetherness/unity will not be easy. Because in this quest for truth together, Paul suggests that we are going to discover our heresies/ (soften that *errors*) that each of us protect. ***You will have factions among you so that you will discover who is genuine***

To illustrate this point

- Probably many in this congregation, would not agree with infant baptism.
- Some of you would believe that the bread of the wine become the physical body and blood of Christ, during the Lord's supper
- some of you would believe that healing miracles are speaking in tongues, ceased at the end of the new Testament period
- some would say the Lord's supper is purely a memorial, a remembrance - while others would fiercely defend the mystery and the power of the sacrament

Whether these things are of consequence, is debatable, however **somebody is right, and somebody is wrong.**

I suggest none of us have the whole truth, we haven't got every right puzzle piece ourselves.

Further, some of us enjoy our **style over truth**, and are not prepared to sacrifice our comfort or familiarity for truth.

We should all be seeking truth and clarity of what we believe, and can never be closed to the discovery of truth out of fear, or pride, academic arrogance, or just plain laziness.

When we become closed, we sink into denominationalism.

Truth matters! And the key to that truth is the Bible. Jn 17:17 *your word is truth.*

We're not all right, and unity without truth is hazardous.

- Unity is not each of us **blindly joining** each other, and **forsaking truth**, rather
- Unity is each of us **lovingly joining** each other, for the **journey toward truth**.

Rupertus Meldenius *On the necessary points- unity, on the questionable points- liberty, in everything- love.*

.... which is a great segue into or I would propose to be the third scripture to inform our life as church in Batemans Bay.

And that is ...

3. JN 13:35 EVERYONE WILL KNOW YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES IF YOU HAVE LOVE ONE FOR ANOTHER

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let there be not one word of criticism, or put down, or negative talk, from us about God's church Batemans Bay. Let us from this day, agree to always speak encouraging and a positive words about each other. For the last thing the church needs in a small town, is of the church to be attacking itself.

In fact let us agree to, publicly advance each other's cause, and actively look for opportunity to speak in glowing terms of what is happening in each other's churches, and celebrate each other's achievements.

Let us not just talk the talk but let us walk the walk, loving one another, that everyone will know we are the church Batemans Bay.

In 1 Cor 12 Paul is talking about the BODY and UNITY what is the next Chapter ?? (don't tell me 13) – it's the famous chapter on LOVE. 1 Cor 13. Paul joins the image of the BODY and UNITY with LOVE. "Love covers a multitude of faults." "Love bears all things, believes all things, love never fails. Without love it is impossible to dwell together in unity. Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. That is how we are to be towards each other. When love prevails among believers, especially in times of strong disagreement, it presents to the world an indisputable mark of a true follower of Jesus Christ.

Here's a truth: It is easier to walk with Jesus, than some of His people! I mean if the guy next to you was normal, he would be in your church wouldn't he? Living as one BODY is not always easy. Sometimes we have to just bear with the weaknesses of others, sometimes those in the church around us can be down-right embarrassing. But we love them as Christ loves his church.

The famous philosopher, Schopenhauer, once used some porcupines to illustrate his point about the difficulty of living in community.

A group of porcupines were marooned in the middle of a frozen field during a terrible blizzard. There was no way they could escape the biting wind. They could not borrow into the frozen ground. As they huddled together to keep warm their sharp quills began to pinch and hurt. The closer they moved together the more the pain increased. Some of the animals could not bear the pain and drew apart to sleep. In the morning those who had done so, had frozen to death.

Churches of Batemans Bay, we need each other, not one of us has a monopoly on truth, but all have access to Love, and Love calls us to be one in Christ that the world may know!.

So I leave you my three scriptures that might inform our life together:

1 Pt 2:9 CHOSEN, ROYAL, HOLY, GOD'S OWN

This tells us who we are and whose we are – get it!

Jn 17:21 MAY WE BE ONE AS THE FATHER AND THE SON ARE ONE

Unity is not UNIFORMITY, but Unity is each of us **lovingly joining** each other, for the **journey toward truth**. Remember

On the necessary points- unity, on the questionable points- liberty, in everything- love

Jn 13:35 LOVE ONE ANOTHER, THAT THE WORLD MAY KNOW GOD

... may God add his blessing ...