



**The Most Reverend Jeffrey Driver
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**Episcopal Ordination Sermon
for
The Right Reverend Dr Stephen Pickard
St Peter's Cathedral, North Adelaide
Saturday, 3 February 2007**

Feast of the Presentation

Stephen Kim Pickard, when you wrote a book chapter some time ago, but which was published only recently, and when you choose as its title, *"The Travails of the Episcopate"*, you were probably unaware of the delicious irony you would provide for us all today.

Today the "travails" begin! This is the day of your Episcopal ordination, as you give yourself to the call of God once more, and as we share with you in this celebration, which is also the celebration of the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in Temple.

The Presentation takes us to the infancy narratives in the Gospel of Luke. And in a way every family has its infancy narratives; its intimate stories, nowadays often accompanied by embarrassing photos, about what happened when little Johnnie or Jane was a baby.

I have a store of them set carefully aside in my aging memory for the embarrassment of my children at some important occasion such as an engagement party or wedding, for I remember well the chagrin I felt as my mother dragged out our family album and began to tell *those* stories when I first took Lindy to meet her future in-laws.

But in this part of Luke we have much more than intimate recollections of a personal nature, much more than a visit to the family album from the early years of Jesus the Christ.

What we have in Luke is no private, personal story to be held only in the family, because one of the things that Luke is determined to do in this part of his Gospel is to give Jesus his place on the world stage.

Luke Chapter 2 commences with those famous words that begin the account of the birth of Jesus:

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration, while Quirinius was Governor of Syria...

From the announcement of his birth, Jesus is made part of history, set on the world stage, in the geo-political, among the disposing of nations.

And soon after the birth narrative, later in Luke chapter 2, comes the story that we call the Presentation, and here Jesus is set within the religious story of his people, represented by the Temple, the public symbol par excellence, of the place of God among the people and in the land.

The story itself is probably an amalgam of the rites of circumcision, the cleansing of a mother after childbirth, and the redemption of the firstborn, none of which absolutely require the child's presence in the Temple.

But the Temple is the symbol of faith in the land, and Luke is clear about this child: he is set from birth within public history, public politics and world religion.

One of the challenges before the Church in countries like Australia, I suggest, is the recovery of public discourse about faith.

It's as if we have become so sensitive to issues of multi-culturalism, and so alarmed at the dangers of rising fundamentalism, that we've resorted to silence.

And the new orthodoxy of post-modern Australia, is that whereas once the public square had to be a neutral space, now it is to be denuded of all religious discourse, and politicians are affronted if the Church seeks to say anything about public policy, as if it is some outrageous heresy to suggest that political questions could ever be informed by spiritual values. So having faith is like having a soft drug habit; it is OK if you do it in private, just so long as you don't begin to deal in public!

Stephen Pickard, in these days of great technological change, of complex ethical debates on matters as far ranging as economics, the environment and human genetics, in these days of emerging militant fundamentalisms, we need more than ever an informed, intelligent and gracious voice of religion in the public sphere.

As a bishop you are called to make your contribution to the public discourse about faith in this land, but perhaps more importantly, to help the Church at large engage with the public issues of our time.

But as a bishop you also need to be attentive to that which slips under the radar of public and institutional religion.

One of the salutary things about the Presentation in the Temple, is that the religious leaders almost certainly did not know it was happening.

It happened at the margin; in that part of the Temple where women could go, and therefore, according to the understanding of the time, where nothing important could occur; at the Nicanor Gate probably. They came like thousands of others, this small family, and made their offering, the one prescribed the poor: a pair of doves or pigeons.

There was an elderly man sharing their joy. He sang them a song. And an old woman who was a common sight about the temple precincts. It was ordinary stuff.

The formal ritual continued elsewhere. They came and went with all the others; an event barely to be noticed.

Stephen, the comforting thing about the story of the Presentation, is that it shows us God *was* present within the institution, even when the institution did not know it.

But that's the confronting thing about this story as well, particularly for a bishop to bear in mind: God *was* present within the institution *and the institution did not know it*, did not recognise its moment of visitation.

We live in a time of massive change in the Church, with many elements of the Church for which you and I were ordained, just half a life-time ago passing away or taking new forms, and many new expressions emerging, often at the edge.

One of the challenges of leadership in these times, I suggest, and part of the "over-seeing" of the episcopate, is to have eyes for those things that God is doing, even under the institutional radar, to look for signs of his presence in the overlooked, the underneath, the emerging, in things that are at the margins, to recognise the new forms and expressions, through which God is seeking to renew his Church, to recognise what Newman called "the noiseless course" of his visitation.

Stephen, in your Episcopal ministry, may you have eyes for the surprising visitations of God. And when you cannot see his presence, then remember his faithfulness.

And may you have faith to see in little possibility *every possibility*.

It seems to me that this was the gift of Simeon, who after years of looking for the consolation of his people, who after years of looking for the Jewish Messiah, could take an infant child of a poor family in his arms, and say:

"Now, master, you are letting your servant go in peace... for my eyes have seen you salvation" (2.29-30).

One more family among many in the crowds. The child. Their small offering. Their prayers. Another day of small things. A monument of insignificance.

But Simeon takes the child in his arms, and in that moment came the transition, from the actually small to the anticipated large.

"My eyes have seen your salvation".

Some people see things as they are. Simeon looks at the actually small and sees the almost impossible; Simeon sees what can be in God.

Here is a "seeing" we need as a Church: to see every possibility in what seems little possibility, for it seems to me that a Church that can only see things as they are, is a Church whose spiritual vision is profoundly impaired, a church perhaps that has lost the courage to see.

These are not easy times for Church, and they have not been easy times for the Church in this Diocese. We've been humiliated by scandals, threatened by divisions within, confronted by diminishing numbers, and sagging confidence.

As a Diocese, as a Church seeking to contribute to Australian society, there are things we have had to face up to, to confront with honesty and courage.

But there is another courage even beyond that, to which we are called. It is the courage of vision. Of seeing, dreaming, believing, seeing the almost impossible might be,

It is the courage of heroic seeing something more; of holding tenderly in our arms that which seems so fragile, but then having the courage to see that which can be in God:

"My eyes have seen your salvation", the old man said as he held the child.

Stephen, may you in your ministry as bishop, may we as a diocese together as we move into the future, find the courage of dreaming, believing, seeing, the almost impossible might be that can be in God, if we dare to see it. If we dare!