



**St Peter's Cathedral, North Adelaide
The Most Reverend Jeffrey Driver
Archbishop of Adelaide**

Ordination Sermon

**Saturday, 4 February 2006
10.00 am**

THE PRESENTATION

The Anglican Church of St Phillip in Gaza,
and its surrounding hospital complex were hit by a missile.

At about 2:15am, Dr Salah, the Arab hospital's physician on call,
awoke to the sound of an explosion in the distance.

Then he saw the distinctive light of a missile approaching. It came slowly, and then
there was a "storm of wind and glass passing like a train through his bedroom."

An elderly woman had arrived at the emergency room just prior to the attack. She
came because she was terrified,
and was suffering from high blood pressure.

The doctor began to examine her and then the missile hit.
It took a few minutes for the electrical generator to come on,
but by the time the Doctor got back to the woman, she was dead.
"She died of fear," he said.

In our world of routinised terror this story did not make a headline.
It was just an old woman with some other unknown people.

Another story and another time.

They came to the Temple like thousands of others,
A small family. A woman carrying a child to the Nicanor gate,
where they made their offering, the one prescribed for poorer families: 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. She was
there.

The formal ritual continued elsewhere.
The little family came and went with thousands of others.
Again an event barely to be noticed.

The emperors and the generals, the planners of war, the holders of power did not
know it. Their aides did not come rushing with news of things changed; strategic
developments.

The United Nations Security Council did not meet.
But things did change in that unnoticed moment.

The child is presented to the world.

*And so they came to the Temple like thousands of others,
A little group in pious observance. A woman carrying a child to the Nicanor
gate, where they made the offering prescribed for the poor; a pair of doves or
pigeons. An elderly woman. An old man singing a song, his face wrinkled with
joy.*

From the human perspective,
all we can see here is insignificance and helplessness.

It is not the pride and strength of the grown man that is presented in the Courts of the
Temple.

Here is no power to overcome, to enforce, to compel.
Here presented is a child.

The "disarming child", Jurgen Moltmann, called Jesus

*The liberator becomes a pleading child in our world, armed to the teeth as it
is¹.*

And there they are: a family of no formal consequence in pious observance. One or
two elderly people sharing their joy. A child.

More likely victims of the world's power, than its possessors.
But here the emperors and the generals are addressed. Here the world as we know it
is being dismantled, challenged, disrupted.

And all by a child; by the politics of God.

And we, the religious, we were there on that day as well.

It was in the Temple, after all,
that this barely noticed presentation took place
It was in Herod's Temple, with all its glory,
spreading to the size of about 20 football fields,
with gleaming white stone in 10 metre blocks,
and gold overlay and priests serving in perpetual roster.

To this great edifice of religion, like thousands of others, they came:

*A little group in pious observance. A woman carrying a child to the Nicanor
gate, where they made the offering prescribed for the poor; a pair of doves or
pigeons. An elderly woman.
An old man with his face wrinkled in joy,
who took the child and spoke of fulfilment.*

¹ Moltmann, J., "The Power of the Powerless", London, SCM 1983. p 35

The hopes of Israel, he said, were met in this one. The fulfilment of their religion...the child. Barely noticed.

The formalities of the Temple continued. Grandly.
Without so much as a pause.

The priests continued their liturgical role.
No message of change reached their ears.
No sense of divine irruption interrupted the grandeur.

But things did change in that unnoticed moment.
The child is presented to the people of God.
He is their fulfilment, but also their judgement.

He comes, but only the inconsequential among them
know he is present.

He comes, but only those who are of no formal account,
rejoice in the hope that this moment presents.

The grand institution goes on with its religious observance,
The formal ritual continues in the courts of the temple.

But they will meet again,
the religious institution and this child.

They will meet with sharp words in the synagogue and desert.
And in the Temple once more, with wrath and with challenge.
There will be those from the institutional ranks who will come to his side.
There will be those who plan yet another meeting,
with wood and blood and nails of iron.
For this child is set for the falling and rising of many in Israel, they said.

And there they are: a family of no formal consequence in pious observance. A small
group of unnoticed people sharing their joy.
The child.

An event barely noticed. But God is there.

And here is the good news of this story and of this day,
as we celebrate the call to ministry in ordination today.
and as you hear that call, Janet and James,
Jenny and Mike.

God comes though those unnoticed by the great ones.
God comes through surprising human weakness, unexpected by the powerful ones.
God is found with the unnoticed, the unremarkable,
the aged and fragile, who in ordinary faithful expectation,
look for his coming....

This is the wonder and the grace of ministry
the wonder and grace of this day:
that God is present among those of no account,
is borne in the arms of fragility,
sung by the unnoticed and aging,
takes human frailty into divine vocation,
and in human weakness speaks his word
to bring down the mighty.

Michael and Jenny, James and Janet,
do not be mistaken ... the call of this day will ask of you your all, your best energies
and gifts.

But the grace of this day, is that God will use you remarkably,
in your weakness, failure, vulnerability and struggle.

*And so they came to the Temple like thousands of others,
A little group in pious observance. A woman carrying a child to the Nicanor
gate, where they made the offering prescribed for the poor; a pair of doves or
pigeons. An elderly woman. An old man singing a song, his face wrinkled with
joy.*

And if, like Simeon and Anna, we dare to expect it,
He continues to come through you and me.