

History, Honour, Hope

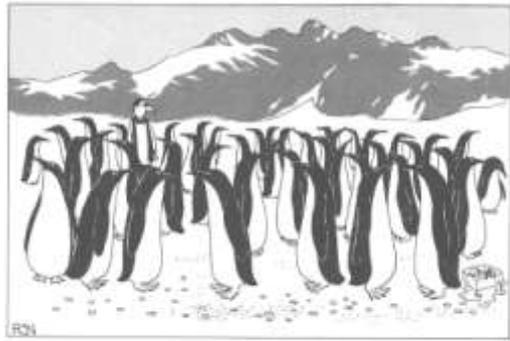
On the occasion of the dedication of the Lady Franklin Flag and
the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in Hobart

Readings: Job 38:1-3, 22-30; 2 Cor 5:6-10; 14-17; Mark 4. 26-34

It is a great privilege to be dedicating the Lady Franklin Flag today and so be part the Antarctic Centennial Celebrations 2011-12, especially as it coincides with the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting.

But I must confess that as I worked on putting this service together I was a little worried how to preach at such a service. I have never preached on a Continent before! When I thought of Antarctica the words which came to mind were: cold, distant, remote. Well I could just say that, God's not like that. Whilst this is true it didn't seem enough.

As I read and pondered further it seemed to me on this occasion we can think about history, about honour and hope.



After a short while, they simply accepted Hugh as one of them.

HISTORY

To some St. David's Cathedral is the perfect place for an Antarctic Service. Anyone who has been here in winter when the heaters haven't been working will know what I mean.

ANTARCTIC CONNECTIONS

But there are very good historic reasons for us to have a service here. Douglas Mawson was farewelled from St. David's on November 26, 1911. Bishop Mercer gave a robust sermon in which he spoke of how this expedition was a sign of courage which needed to be shown particularly in the moral sphere. It showed the spirit of adventure which so marked "the British race." It would be an inspiration to those who "were loafing about the street corners with their hands in their pockets, no good to themselves or anyone else" and to schools which were becoming soft, "namby-pamby", for which he blamed the parents. What was needed was more grit, of which he clearly believed Mawson's party delivered in spades, and which history showed to be true.

On 17 March 1912, there was a service of thanksgiving for Roald Amundsen successful South Pole expedition along with prayers for Scott's party, long overdue from the pole. The service was attended by Scott's sister, Ettie Myers Scott, who was married to the soon to be Tasmanian Governor, Sir William Ellison-Macartney. Scott was still alive on this date but died a couple of weeks later, with their bodies not found until the November. There was a memorial service at St. David's the following February.

Perhaps less well known is that a decade earlier the Clergy and Choir of the Cathedral had processed to wharf for a shipboard service for the British Antarctic Expedition of 1898-1900. C.E. Borchgrevink, who led this expedition, was the first man to set foot on the Antarctic¹

On top of this we have been since 1946 we have been the custodians of the Lady Franklin Flag with further links to Tasmanian Governors, Governor's wives and tragic polar expeditions.²

Given all this St. David's is a very appropriate place for an Antarctic Service.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

But what are we to do with such a history, can we learn anything from history.

We can certainly learn from the example of those involved in the epic events we remember today.

For instance Lady Jane Franklin's ongoing commitment to her husband. It was said of her 'What the nation would not do, a woman did' as she sponsored 7 expeditions to find what had happened to him and his exhibition. Rarely has a family motto of *nisu*, struggle, been so appropriate.

We can be inspired by Mawson's courage and determination struggling on for 30 days alone after the death of his companions to successfully bring the results of their journey back to the base.

We can learn from Scott's desire that his family be cared for. The last words in his journal "It seems a pity but I do not think I can write more. For God's sake look after our people."

I was inspired and moved by the faith of Edward Wilson, Scott's chief scientist, whose well worn Book of Common Prayer was with him to the end. Scott wrote to his wife "If this letter reaches you, Bill and I will have gone out together....His eyes have a comfortable blue look of hope and his mind is peaceful with the satisfaction of his faith in regarding himself as part of the great scheme of the Almighty."

¹ With thanks to Prof Peter Boyce, for this information which is from a forthcoming history of St. David's Cathedral.

² REMARKS BY MRS FRANCES UNDERWOOD AT THE DEDICATION OF LADY FRANKLIN'S FLAG, ST DAVID'S CATHEDRAL, HOBART. SUNDAY 17TH JUNE 2012

One hundred and fifty five years ago Lady Jane Franklin, wife of a former Governor of this State, gave the flag I am about to unveil to one Lieutenant WR Hobson. Hobson's mission was to take part in an expedition commissioned by Lady Jane to find her husband who had disappeared on an ill-fated expedition he undertook in 1845 to find the North West passage in the northern polar region. Hobson's mission was completed in 1859 when he found evidence of Sir John's death on King William Island in 1847.

The flag found its way back to England and hung for many years in Exeter Cathedral next to a similar flag from Captain Scott's Antarctic sledge. In 1946 another Tasmanian Governor, Sir Hugh Binney, presented the flag to the people of Tasmania and it has hung here in this cathedral ever since.

It is an honour for me as the wife of the 27th Governor of Tasmania to have been asked to continue the connection between the Office of the Governor of Tasmania and polar explorers of the past by unveiling this flag as part of a re-dedication service to commemorate the sacrifices of those brave men.

As the English writer and artist William Morris once said, "History is living in us and will be alive in the future which we are now helping to make."

The poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson, wrote the following verse for the memorial erected by Lady Jane in Westminster Abbey to her husband:

*Not here! The white north hath thy bones and thou
Heroic sailor soul
Art passing on thine happier voyage now
Toward no earthly pole*

WHO CARES ABOUT HISTORY – GOD DOES

But as Christians we can go further than this, history is important because it is important to God.

Our scriptures are full of history, in fact there is little else.

Our service is done in remembrance of historic events.

Our creed encompasses history taking us from creation to new creation, and the God who entered history in Jesus who died under Pontius Pilate. History matters to God personally.

Christianity is thus truly an historic faith, based in history, and its promise is not about release from history, or an eternal cycle, but rather is about history redeemed and rescued all part of “the great scheme of the Almighty”.

Christians then should celebrate history, know our history, believe in history, because history matters to God, and it is not forgotten by him. This ultimately is comforting because as we all are part of history then we all matter to God.

And we are to live in history as Paul puts it, as new creations living to God's glory now, not turning our back on history but playing our part in God's story, and this is not in vain.

HONOUR (SCIENTIFIC ENDEAVOUR)

Part of the outworking of this is that the Church should not be something separate from and in retreat from the world but rather should be a confident part of society.

We see this in the way in which the Church was involved in those great events of a century ago and its support for these great epic endeavours. I am not arguing for a return to the “good old days”. But just as the Church then honoured and supported those who sort to expand the sum of human knowledge so we should now.

For instance Mawson's expedition led to advances in cartography, geology, meteorology, aurora, geomagnetism, biology and marine science. These are great things and we should be looking to bless, support and pray for all those who continue to increase our knowledge and understanding.

The debates about faith and science in the past century have meant that the Church has at times viewed the scientific enterprise with suspicion, and vice versa. But the Scriptures encourage us to understand God's world and learn from it.

There are not a lot of Scriptural passage about ice and snow and we managed to get a couple of them into the service today. The passage from Job has God reminding us of his creative power, even in the wind, snow and ice, and this is his good and ordered world.

As this is God's good world made for our benefit, then the outcome of investigation and understanding of the world can be for our good. Science is good for us as we look, seek to understand, and live in God's world.

Furthermore because this is God's world, biblical faith has nothing to fear from where science may lead. All truth is ultimately God's truth, from the cosmological wonders of the expanse of universe captured in the night sky, to the extraordinary complexity of the human genome in the twists of DNA's double helix. These are all part of God's good creation for us to explore, understand and marvel at.

Christians then should believe in science and honour those who are involved in it, whether that be in the sub atomic or Antarctic, and pray that the results of such endeavours would be used not for quick material gain but the good of all humanity.

HOPE (OF THE NATIONS)

Which leads to my last reflection. Much has been made in the media in the past week over the Antarctic Treaty. For here we have a successful model of international cooperation which, by banning weapons and mining, secures the Continent as a place of peace and scientific research.

Here we have perhaps a foretaste of the biblical image of the new creation where nation will not lift up sword against nation, and weapons of war will be transformed into productive instruments of agriculture. It is theologically ironic that a place of such cold can be seen as an image of heaven, given the imagined temperature of the other place. But in Antarctica we do have an image of the hope of the nations.

Ultimately such a future will not come through a treaty but by trust in God and by his working in and through us. Our Gospel reading reminds us that this day will come in God's good time, when the kingdom of God will come to full flowering. But for every foretaste of the day when Jesus the prince of peace will reign we give thanks. and continue to pray that God's will will be done on all the ends of the earth as it is heaven. Amen.