



Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist

A Vision of the Kingdom - Painting a Picture

†Martin: St Mark the Evangelist
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1 The Kingdom of God

1.1 Painting a Picture

My family is full of artists. One of the things I have learnt from them is that when you paint a picture you don't *have to* reflect exactly what you see. You start with a blank canvas. You are free to make things look better or worse than they are, to paint things the way *you wish* they were, or to show what is happening behind the scenes!

As I prayed and thought about this Charge, God seemed to be saying to me: "Paint a picture of the Nation and the Church as I would like it to be." So this is my attempt to paint a picture - and I invite you to engage with God, the picture and one another as we develop our common picture of what God would like to see.

Of course that will lead us to compare our God-inspired picture with the reality of South Africa and our Church. And that, hopefully, will lead to action as we seek to allow God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to transform us to reflect his picture more closely.

An artist who is preparing to start a painting must first get certain things ready - canvas, paints, paint brushes and so on. We also have certain non-negotiable things to get in place before we start. So let's start with these Kingdom essentials.

1.2 God Reigns!

1.2.1 Creator of All

God is Lord of all, who created everything out of nothing. No spiritual or physical power can ever come close to comparing with God. This amazing universe (which is way more awesome, huge, mysterious and beautiful than anything we can imagine) came into being when God the Holy Trinity spoke, "Let there be light" (*Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-4*).

Sadly some of the spiritual powers, and human beings also, soon rebelled against God, which set in motion a spiral of violence, pain, pollution, and destruction that continues to this day (*Genesis 3 & 4*). All of us became tainted by this rebellious, sinful nature (*Romans 3:23*) and continue to bear the disastrous consequences (*Romans 6:23*). Fortunately, God never forgot his plan to save and bless all people (*Genesis 12:1-3*).

1.2.2 Jesus

So at the right time Jesus, Emmanuel, God-with-us, came into the world (*Galatians 4:4-6*). He proclaimed the Good News, healed the sick, drove out the demons and carried the consequences of our sin on the cross (*1 Peter 2:24*). This was the decisive victory of all time: "It is finished - completed!" he cried (*John 19:30*). Once and for all he defeated and disarmed the spiritual forces of evil that rebelled against God (*Colossians 2:13-15*).

Through faith in Jesus we become adopted children of God (*John 1:12*). The Holy Spirit floods our hearts so that we know God inwardly in intimately (*Romans 8:15-17*). Getting to know and love and serve this God through faith in Jesus has to be the greatest adventure of all time! That is our privilege.

As a result of Jesus' victory on the cross and his ascension into heaven, it is absolutely inevitable that God will reign, God's kingdom will come, in the end. Every knee will bow - voluntarily or involuntarily - and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (*Philippians 2:8-11*).

1.3 Bigger Than...

Sometimes leaders of the nations and the church forget that the Kingdom of God is far bigger than either any nation or church! God calls nation and church to submit to his reign and serve his kingdom - not the other way round. Scripture makes it clear that, while leaders may be answerable to their people now, in the long run we are all answerable to God. Many of Jesus' parables remind us that God will require all of us to give an account for our lives (e.g. *Matthew 25:31-32*):

- ✦ Did we get to know him as Lord and Saviour?
- ✦ Did we live for ourselves or for God?
- ✦ Did we love God with all our being and our neighbours as ourselves?
- ✦ Did we use our gifts and talents to proclaim the Gospel, heal the sick and confront evil in the power of the Holy Spirit?
- ✦ Did we continue the mission and ministry of Jesus in the world?

1.4 Work In Progress

I'm sure that it is clear from the above that we fall far short of these ideals. We live in tension between what God has **already** accomplished in us, and what is **not yet** visible in our lives. That is the wonder of the cross! Through Jesus God has already made provision for our failures, mistakes and even our deliberate sins - provided that we keep examining ourselves and turning back to him in faith and obedience. Then we can experience his forgiveness and cleansing (*1 John 1:6-10*).

The Holy Spirit works in us to transform us, slowly but surely, into God's image (*2 Corinthians 3:18*). We find that we are beginning to see things from God's point of view; that our thinking, values and behaviour become increasingly like Jesus (*Romans 12:1-2*). This applies to individuals, churches and nations if we surrender to him.

What an adventure! What a mystery! And how we can look forward to that Day when we will stand before him and see him face to face!

2 The Nation and the Kingdom of God

2.1 Painting a Picture of South Africa

I have found myself asking, **what will South Africa look like if God's Kingdom comes among us** (after all we pray that every time we use the Lord's Prayer)? At the "Anglican's Ablaze" Leaders' Conference in Natal last year one of the speakers challenged us to articulate a clear vision for the people of the country. One of our problems is that very few leaders are painting a compelling picture of what we could be...

2.1.1 God Is King

The first thing is that **God will be acknowledged as King**. Under God's reign our leaders will be humble enough to recognise that we don't have all the answers and to admit our failures. In the end only what God builds or enables us to build will stand (*Psalms 127:1*). The arrogance which says, "Keep out of *our* business, God, and we will call on you for help when we need you" has got us nowhere! Let us get on to our knees, acknowledge God as Lord and King, cry out to God to save us, turn from evil and seek God's will for our land (*2 Chronicles 7:14*). That is the way to be blessed.

2.1.2 Godly Values

Secondly, if God's Kingdom comes the country will reflect God's values. Let me highlight some of them under three headings:

1) Love: John writes that we cannot claim to love God unless we love one another (*1 John 4:20-21*). That is not a foreign idea to those from a traditional African background - the concept of "Ubuntu" is all about loving one another in practical, down to earth ways. It says that as long as one person is suffering we are all suffering and must do something about it. This self-sacrificial love reflects the love of God in Jesus, and means that we look out for the needs of others as much as, or more than, ourselves. ***Imagine a South Africa*** where:

- ✦ Business owners and managers said, "What can we do to give our workers the best possible quality of life?"
- ✦ Workers and Trade Unions said: "What can we do to make our company do really well and be more productive?"

What a transformation that would bring!

2) Justice: In the Bible justice is more about making things right than about punishing those who do wrong. It is about reconciliation that comes from setting right the injustices of the past in such a way that those who have been wronged can forgive. It is about righteousness - being in right relationship with God and having right relationships with other people and our environment. It is about restoring what has been unjustly taken away: land, decent education, opportunity. ***Imagine a South Africa*** where those who have more than they need (black and white!) gave generously of their time, expertise and money to help others become economically free.

3) Shalom: The best English word we have for this Biblical idea is "peace" - but it is so much more than that. Shalom is about total well-being, the abundant life that Jesus came to bring (*John 10:10*). It conveys that idea that everyone feels safe and respected. It is a society where children grow up in families that love and nurture them, have access to adequate health care, and have fathers and mothers who are present to provide for their needs. ***Imagine a South Africa*** free from the scourges of HIV & AIDS and TB, where parents together bring up their children in faith and love, and families reach out to those in need. ***Imagine a South Africa*** where we and our children can walk on the streets safely at night.

2.2 The State of the Nation

2.2.1 Signs of the Kingdom

Let us give credit where it is due: the South Africa of 2012 is unrecognisable from the unjust, corrupt, oppressive place that we were under apartheid. Many of us have lived through a miracle! The Constitution of the new South Africa makes us all equal before the law and commits us to setting right the imbalances of the past. Drawing from the Freedom Charter, it articulates the aspirations of many South Africans. But for Christians it is *not* the supreme law - *that* belongs to God and his Word (written in the Bible and incarnate in Jesus).

We have also seen progress in many areas. It has become commonplace to have well run, free and fair democratic elections. The supply of water and electricity to our homes (with some hiccoughs!) has increased remarkably. Many hundreds of thousands of houses have been built, although the influx of people to urban areas keeps challenging that. South Africa's finances are particularly well managed and the South African Revenue Services are more efficient than ever. Under Minister Aaron Motsoaledi the Department of Health is making enormous strides, and we all look forward to a good National Health Insurance scheme. The Planning

Commission under Minister Trevor Manuel is beginning to articulate an inspiring vision for South Africa in 2030.

2.2.2 Falling Short

But, sadly and often unnecessarily, we still fall short in very many ways - and we are experiencing an increasing, seething anger and discontent in many people. It is as though someone is taking a big red paintbrush and messing all over our beautiful painting! Think of the many, increasingly violent, service delivery protests. Think of the recent events surrounding the ANC Youth League. Think of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's angry outburst when the Dali Lama did not receive a visa to travel to South Africa. We ignore these signs of the times at our peril.

In particular, let me address these concerns under three headings:

- 1) Moral Failure: How sad that many of those entrusted with the future of the country and the well-being of its people have fallen to the temptations of money, sex and power! This is what happens when we arrogantly trust ourselves instead of trusting God. It happens when we begin to think we are important because we have been put in responsible or powerful positions. Let us say out loud at the top of our voices: "Abuse of women and children is totally unacceptable! Giving or taking bribes is totally unacceptable! Getting involved in crooked tenders is totally unacceptable!" You may get away with it now, but God will be your judge.
Pleasing ourselves at the expense of others is against the Kingdom of God and God is against people who do those things. We, the people of God, must refuse to participate in any kind of corruption or abuse, indeed we must expose it, help those who are its victims, and help those who do these things to repent.
- 2) Leadership: It seems to me that ***poor leadership is at the root of many of our problems*** - whether that is in the family, at work or in politics. It leads to a loss of vision and accepting low standards of behaviour and work. If incompetent or corrupt officials know that their bosses are no better, or will not do anything about it, it leads to poor or non-existent service delivery. On that note, I welcome the intervention of National Government by placing several Limpopo Provincial Departments under administration. But, with the poor record of several National Departments, I wonder what kind of improvement this will make? A particular concern is the slow pace of land reform, and the amount of land that has become unproductive since restitution - new landowners need help, but must also be ready to learn. On the home front, lack of leadership by fathers (many of whom seem to think their only role in raising children is to make women pregnant) is leading to the disintegration of our families, which will have disastrous consequences for our nation.
- 3) Some Examples: We have our own experience of these frustrations as a Diocese. Let me give you some examples:
 - ✦ The old ***Jane Furse Memorial Hospital*** was vandalised by government departments when they moved out. They admitted that this had taken place and agreed to the joint appointment of a Quantity Surveyor to assess the damages - which came (conservatively) to R1 million. Now the Departments involved are refusing to pay. Yet the Provincial Department of Health failed to spend its budget last year. ***Why?***
 - ✦ In 2003 ***St Mark's College*** became a "Public School on Private Land" with immense potential to give the Department of Education a centre of excellence for the whole of Sekhukhuneland. Instead it has been allowed to slip towards mediocrity despite all our attempts to have a fruitful partnership. ***Why?*** We are now moving back towards becoming an Independent Church School in 2014.

- ✦ The ***Church of the Good Shepherd*** started on a vacant piece of land in Extension 44 (between Polokwane and Seshego) just over three years ago. The church is growing and serving the community. We have plans to build a church and open a pre-school in it. Yet our applications to buy the land have been ignored for nearly three years. **Why?** Is it purely incompetence or is someone looking for a bribe?

3 The Church and the Kingdom of God

3.1 Painting a Picture of the Church

Now let's take our paintbrush and try to paint the kind of Church that will be able to speak and live out the Kingdom of God in this context. Our quality of life and witness must be such that the world looks at us and says, "Now *that* is what we need."

In fact, we need to look no further than the new Vision and Mission Statements of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) and the Vision of the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist. What a stunning picture they paint!

3.1.1 The Vision and Mission of the ACSA

- 1) Vision Statement: The Anglican community in Southern Africa seeks to be
 - ✦ ***Anchored*** - in the love of Christ
 - ✦ ***Committed*** - to God's mission
 - ✦ ***Transformed*** - by the Holy Spirit.
- 2) Mission statement: Across the diverse countries and cultures of our region, we seek:
 - ✦ To ***honour God in worship*** that feeds and empowers us for faithful witness and service
 - ✦ To ***embody and proclaim the message*** of God's redemptive hope and healing for people and creation
 - ✦ To ***grow communities of faith*** that form, inform, and transform those who follow Christ.

What a picture! Imagine an Anglican Church that is all those things. Now *that* is the church that I want to be part of.

3.1.2 The vision of the Diocese of St Mark the Evangelist

Our Diocesan vision spells out a little more specifically what that means for us in our context of Limpopo:

To ***make disciples*** in vibrant, self-sufficient Congregations established and linked to each other by sharing in:

- ✦ Resources
- ✦ Ministry and service
- ✦ Outreach and evangelism.

Personally, I have no interest in all at simply maintaining the church as it is! We are wasting our time and energy unless we are reflecting this vision more and more.

3.1.3 A Call to Prayer

These vision and mission statements are a call to prayer. We cannot make them come true on our own. But with God's guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit they can become an inspiring and world-changing reality. I encourage you to join me in praying regularly Paul's prayer in ***Ephesians 3:14-21***.

3.2 Implications of this Picture

The two fundamental implications of this picture are to keep **making disciples**, and to keep **growing and multiplying churches**. So let me sketch some important aspects of this calling.

3.2.1 Nine Qualities

Drawing on the work of Christian Schwarz in "Natural Church Development" we have identified 9 qualities that we are working to develop in each of our churches:

- 1) Empowering Leadership: leaders who empower others for mission and ministry (2 Timothy 2:2; Mark 10:42-45)
- 2) Every Member Ministry: opportunities for all members (including young people and children) to discover their gifts and use them in God's service (Romans 12:3-8).
- 3) Passionate Spirituality: people who have a living, growing relationship of love with God (2 Timothy 1:6-7).
- 4) Inspiring Worship: services that help people to meet God - making the best of Anglican tradition and new styles (Romans 12:1-2).
- 5) Effective Structures: good administration, well managed finances, generous giving and effective meetings (Acts 6:1-6).
- 6) Holistic Small Groups: Cell groups, House Churches, Rooted in Jesus groups that meet to make disciples through fellowship, Bible study, prayer, support & action (Acts 2:42-47).
- 7) Loving Relationships: mutual respect, love, acceptance and forgiveness in our life together (John 13:34-35).
- 8) Relevant Evangelism: sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with people in the community so that they come to faith in him (1 Peter 3:14-16)
- 9) Caring Community Development: working with the community to overcome poverty, suffering, HIV & AIDS (Matthew 25:34-40).

Please don't ever become satisfied with things as they are in your church! Ask God to show you where to start - one thing at a time. Keep sharing this vision with your people - there is enough in this list to keep you preaching, teaching and leading for the rest of your life.

3.2.2 Picture of a Healthy Parish

So what will a healthy parish look like? Here is what I believe we should be working towards in all our churches. It is a simple strategy to help us to grow towards these qualities. Our aim is for every parish to have:

- 1) A Stipendiary Rector: who gives vision, leads the team, and equips others for ministry.
- 2) A Team of Community Priests and Deacons: to oversee ministries of word, sacrament and pastoral care.
- 3) A Parish Youth Pastor: to focus on the children and young people in our care.
- 4) Many Lay Leaders: to share the ministry of the parish according to their gifts and passions.
- 5) Ministry of all Believers: in which every member of the church is given the opportunity to keep growing as a disciple of Jesus and to share in mission & ministry.
- 6) Wherever we have land: some kind of income-generating project that also serves the community and creates work for at least one person (e.g. growing vegetables, making bricks, running a crèche).

3.3 State of the Diocese

So how do we rate next to that picture? You probably have a much clearer picture than me of your part of the church (after all, people only show the Bishop what they *want* him to see!). Some parishes are doing quite well. To be honest, I think that most of us fall quite far short. But how good or bad we are is not that important. More important is ***what direction are we moving in?*** Are we improving or getting worse?

3.3.1 Signs of the Kingdom

When I visit our churches - a different one nearly every week - I ***can*** see signs of the Kingdom of God. Here are some of them:

1) Signs of life: I see signs of life in many places:

- ✦ In churches and among confirmation candidates who are growing as disciples of Jesus because they are using ***Rooted in Jesus***.
- ✦ Where ***Preachers' Clubs*** are meeting regularly as a result of our "Growing the Word" courses with Langham Preaching.
- ✦ At Christ Church Cathedral as it transforms into a centre of mission to the city and Diocese.
- ✦ In one of our poorest churches, at Extension 44, where the lives of many, especially children, have already been transformed, and the community is noticing (if only the City Council would wake up and let us have our piece of land!).

2) Jane Furse Memorial Village: After several years of hard work by the team we are at last seeing progress at Jane Furse. The old hospital campus is once again beginning to buzz with life as the two sides of the village begin to blossom:

- ✦ The ***commercial*** side, with Jane Furse Building Supplies and the District Municipality as our major tenants, together with a number houses that are leased out.
- ✦ The ***community development*** side, with a LEAP School, Operation Hunger and a clinic among the important aspects. And congratulations to the Diocesan AWF who have decided to sponsor the start of a retreat centre.

Please continue to pray for this project. It has the potential to make a huge impact on our mission and ministry in Sekhukhuneland and throughout the Diocese. Although this land has been returned to the church under the land restitution process, we are ***still waiting*** (after eight years!) to get the title deed.

3) Emerging Young Leaders: It has been very encouraging to me to meet a few times with Diocesan Youth Leaders in the last year. They are so vibrant and full of faith! They so want to grow as disciples of Jesus and make an impact on their churches and communities! We have a committed team who are planning a Diocesan Youth Camp from 12th-14th October, where a visiting SOMA Team will provide the teaching. Clergy and members of the Guild of St Mark will be invited to join them on Saturday 13th to see what God is doing among our young people. If your parish would like to invite a SOMA team at that time, please speak to me and I will invite them.

There are many more things that I would love to write about: our Diocesan ***Anglicans Ablaze Conference*** from 15th-17th June; the growth of the ***Guild of St Mark***; moves towards helping some of our largest parishes (e.g. Sekhukhuneland, Sibasa and Tlhatlaganya) to ***multiply***; dreams to ***plant at least one new church*** in Polokwane, improvements in the way parishes ***are managed*** as a result of the hard work of the Leadership Team and Church Councils...

God is good. He has given us vision and, as we turn to him, he will give us the strength, love and wisdom to make these things happen.

3.3.2 Falling Short

But, inevitably, we also fall short of our ideals in many ways. Let me mention some of them - not to make you feel bad, but to spur you on to do better under the Holy Spirit's guidance.

- 1) Bad Relationships: There are still too many parishes where bad relationships are ruining our witness and paralysing the church. I don't understand how people who have experienced God's forgiveness can fail to forgive each other! Jesus had some very stern things to say about that (*Matthew 18:23-35*). But it takes a big person, a person of real faith to say, from the heart, "I am sorry" and "I forgive you". I don't understand how people who claim to be following Jesus can engage in power struggles when Jesus clearly said, "whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (*Mark 10:42-45*).
- 2) Management Problems: Despite the clear teaching of the Leadership Team and the clear requirements of the Diocesan Finance Board (and the law!) some parishes continue with bad management - things like failing to keep proper control of money; not preparing properly for Vestry and Council meetings; failing to follow the correct procedure in Church Council elections; not sending in financial returns. These things are not difficult to do, but they require discipline and effort to put them in place.
- 3) Follow Through: I commended some parishes for the way they are making use of ***Rooted in Jesus***. I commended those who have attended our Preaching Schools and now meet regularly in ***Preachers' Clubs***. But what about the others? What is the point of attending a training seminar if we don't use what we learn? I expect to see ***Rooted in Jesus*** groups and ***Preachers' Clubs*** springing up everywhere in the Diocese! God will bless you so if you are part of things!
- 4) Inability to Change: I love the Anglican Church, and especially its values - things like incarnational ministry; the balance of word and sacrament; our liturgies which are beautiful and flexible; the ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons; the fact that we are part of a world-wide Communion with immense variety and vibrant life in many places; the fact that we are not afraid to ask hard questions and debate them honestly (like human sexuality); our commitment to see justice and reconciliation in the world... But too often, instead of focusing on these things, we think that being Anglican means keeping up 19th century traditions (have you noticed, we are now in the 21st century?) while the world passes us by! The essence of Anglicanism is ***allowing the Holy Spirit to keep transforming us*** so that we and our message are relevant to the world and context in which we live. Let's be bold enough to embrace new ways of doing things without losing the qualities that we value as Anglicans.

4 A Half-Finished Painting

From all this you will have realised that my painting is far from complete! In one sense it will only be complete when Jesus returns to establish God's kingdom in all its glory. In another sense it requires all of us to paint together.

In this charge I have tried to draw some outlines of the picture and colour in a few sections of it. Please join me, during this Synod year, in building up the picture that God wants us to paint and bringing it to colourful reality. What do you think?

- ✦ What will South Africa look like if the Kingdom of God comes among us?
- ✦ What kind of church does God want to represent him and his Kingdom on earth?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly: ***Who is God calling you to be, and what is God calling you to do*** so that this Kingdom becomes a reality among us?

God can transform us into this church (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Amen.