



THE GERARD TUCKER ORATION DELIVERED BY: THE VENERABLE JAN CROMBIE

Sunday 21 August 2016 at Christ Church South Yarra

“PROPHETIC PASSION: THE CONTINUUM IN THE BROTHERHOOD OF ST LAURENCE”

Isa 61:1-9; Luke 13:18-25, 29-30

Starting points are influential frameworks, and framing, for our life. For Gerard Tucker, this... was his starting point. The Church of England parish of Christ Church, South Yarra, where his father was the parish priest. Where his English grandfather, also a priest, came to live with them. Tucker was, and with various other clergy relatives, and indeed his mother, siblings and extended family, caught up in a dynasty of the church – and he spent his ordained life making his own unique mark in that dynasty to the point where now his father and grandfather are known in *his* identity; that is, as the family of Gerard Kennedy Tucker, founder of the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Community Aid Abroad. The socio-economic environment of this side of the river was also significant for Tucker in a contrast framework; the stark and inequitable framework of those with wealth and chance, to those lives caught in the slum cycle of disadvantage and limit.

In this great honour of presenting the Oration in his name, my starting points with the Brotherhood, and the church, are particular as well. Not grand; but quietly grounded in my childhood in Melbourne where the Brotherhood was revered in our household. Even above the Salvation Army! In later years I connected that knowing with the close friendship my parents had with the Austin family. Richard Austin was a key benefactor to the Brotherhood of St Laurence, and Geelong Grammar.

Such framing in my life interestingly sits in the dichotomy that still exists in the Brotherhood’s context. My faith, and church life, developed in a household which my

mother rooted firmly and deeply in Anglican church involvement and activity; but there was no awareness in my young life that the Brotherhood of St Laurence was of “our church”. I now meet Anglican clergy of this diocese who are still not sure whether it is of a Roman Catholic background. In this Oration I will identify some key turning points in the story of Tucker and the development of his Brotherhood that have influenced this context. I do so in the framework of another personal starting point and identity, that is, as the Diocesan Coordinator for Parish Partnerships, a ministry position visioned by the church and its agencies that began two years ago.

The most significant, overarching, starting point for Gerard Tucker, my mother, myself and indeed all Christians, is our baptism into Christ. In the making of the symbol of the cross on our foreheads, wet from the baptismal water, the words are said: “I sign you with the sign of the cross to show that you are marked as Christ’s own for ever.” In the mystery of the new birth and new identity now as “Christian” we believe the Holy Spirit of God enlivens the gift we are to bring to God in service and in contribution to the shaping of God’s kingdom. We are stirred with God’s passion of love for all that God has made, and we are called to march into our life’s adventure in that spirit. For Christ himself, from the moment of his baptism, he was galvanised into his life ministry, as the living revelation of God, gathering thousands around him with his healing truth and teaching. As he indeed continues to gather. For Gerard Tucker, his life became that march also, with passion and perseverance – prophetic passion for the church to be known by its social actions, and perseverance with that church as he sought for that corresponding passion.

Prophetic passion – a very powerful combination whenever it appears. Change in this world is wrought when the voice of the prophet is taken up with those with the passion to see the new vision become a reality. Gerard Tucker was that rare combination of both – prophetic in vision, and a driver to make it happen.

Religious history and its own sense of story accepts prophets. They are not comfortable people, sometimes downright strange, but they are listened to with a real sense of either hope or doom, of what could be. Those with passion and zeal are also readily noticed, and also not always accepted as easy to be with. Well, in the Anglican church, let’s face it, being passionate is rather a scary concept. There

is an international church health tool, Natural Church Development, NCD, that diagnoses through eight areas of church health life – and the area that is, without fail, the lowest in Anglican faith communities is “passionate spirituality”. That is, how we connect the Word, the teaching, right into our life with confidence and meaning.

Gerard Tucker would not have had a low score in that area of the NCD. His initial and life-long passion was to invigorate the church through firstly a structure that would be highly effective in focussing on its mission, and secondly, creating that mission to be the reclaiming of what he believed was the church’s true work. That is, social action to do the work Christ proclaimed as his identity, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah that we heard this evening....

“ he spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners”... and this will be done, claims Isaiah and Christ, in the right spirit of hope from our God...
“to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.”

There it is; the basis for Tucker’s action plan of mission and passion. The ability to create effective strategic processes was very important, and indeed a key gift, of Gerard Tucker’s. The strategic structure to invigorate the church was his Brotherhood; a religious order of men who by living in community in parishes could bring focussed intention and attention to the work at hand. This focus would be enhanced by a commitment to celibacy; not for life, but for the time of the job. And money would be saved by dividing a stipend into three or four.

Gerard Tucker would say his Brotherhood Order failed. The concept of a religious community lasted 15 years, but rather than failure it seems to me it was the crucial formation and learning time for Tucker as he explored not only ways to galvanise the church, but also how to stir the social justice hearts of people. Michael Clarke, one of the three original founders of the Brotherhood with Tucker said this..

“it seeks to further the work of the church in a way almost unknown to the vast majority of church people.

..... it is the fellowship which makes this social work possible which is really important. Pursing a method which is so primitive as to be apostolic, we are called new fangled by a church which is itself apostolic.” p 65 “God and three shillings” I R Carter

The principles on which Tucker founded the Brotherhood, and the ministry processes he developed in those years, are important for us to understand in our viewing of the Brotherhood’s narrative and current position. These include:

- All work is of equal importance; the criteria to prove worth for Tucker was scrubbing floors as well as preaching.
- Building congregations and raising funds with vigour and dynamism were inherited patterns of work from both his father and grandfather.
- The active Christian life means involvement in social reform.
- The role of the church is to arouse the conscience of the community, and to implement attitudinal change.

Tucker had absolute faith Christians were waiting to be stirred up to give practical expression to their faith. And now we begin to identify where Tucker’s prophetic passion was actually bigger than the church itself, and how history, Bishops and Tucker’s own missionary focus and the way he got things done, began to influence that “way he got things done”.

As the Second World War approached, and the Brotherhood of clergy and those in discernment for Holy Orders decreased, Tucker’s own war on the slums of Melbourne was taking him into new avenues of connection. There was also the continuing shift into creating programs and projects that weren’t just about sustenance; they had to give new hope, and be sustainable in that aspiration. Tucker’s strategy for getting people involved was, and is, of such good worth because it began with arousing local passion, then enlisting volunteers, and, once there was proven success for the good work being done, he would create a campaign with publicity and associated fundraising. Money was never the starting point – which used to frustrate both bishops and organising committees. But the

money came, and those who heard Tucker speak with his passion and call to justice, in a sense, became his disciples. In organisational speak, they were the people that formed the Friends of the Brotherhood. That was certainly the case for Richard Austin, after hearing Tucker speak at the Lara church.

The Friends group began in 1933 when Tucker returned to Melbourne, and began quarterly newsletters to keep people not only informed of what was happening with the Brotherhood's work, but to unite them in vision and unity for the Brotherhood. These newsletters from Tucker continued for 40 years, and were a key strategy to build and shape the Brotherhood. Originally to parishioners, the group extended in its network as more and more community members became involved. This is a key influence in the history of the Brotherhood, and especially post-war when Tucker's campaigns turned to advocacy and political engagement. He is remembered for saying that Christ went into politics on behalf of the poor, and isn't that a proper church function?

On the whole the Archbishops of Melbourne supported Tucker, but one area did not in the end gain that support, which I believe was prophetic in action, and that was Tucker's passion for gathering young men to test their vocation through the work of the Brotherhood. It seems to me a wonderful model of discernment; to be on the ground working in parish and community life, engaged fully in the cycles of worship and church training. There was a team approach to ministry; Tucker was a great advocate of pouring human resource into a parish to get ministry going. Candidates and aspirants were also sponsored in theological study and learnt how to live in community - again, the scrubbing of the floors as part of sacramental living.

Tucker emerged from the Second World War with social reform his main agenda; the reform of the church had stalled as he had discerned that it was not the vehicle to fulfil his aims. He continued to fight with great passion against moral wrong, in particular for the abolition of the slums. In that campaign, 1946 – 1954, he was joined by his nephew David Scott who as we know went on to head up Community Aid Abroad (that had begun with Tucker's initiative "Food for Peace" in 1951), and then the Brotherhood itself in 1970. It was also near the end of the war that what has become a key identifier for the Brotherhood emerged; that is, social research.

The Brotherhood engaged in finding the evidential data and causes around the issue of “problem families” – families that kept being thrown out of every place they were allocated. Tucker became a great advocate for research to help change social welfare needs – and to dispel ignorance. This foundational tool is part of Tucker’s strong vision for the Brotherhood of St Laurence that it be an organisation for people to help people.

It is very easy to talk about the many issues and campaigns that Tucker initiated and was passionate about; for example, I haven’t touched on what I believe was a key visionary area, that is, housing schemes for the aged that honoured activity and full life involvement. But let us now discern with our 2016 eyes elements of Tucker’s prophetic passion that can influence the Brotherhood, and the church, in its current emerging shift in approaches to community engagement.

In 2014 the current CEO of the Brotherhood, Tony Nicholson, also spoke with prophetic passion when he presented a paper on “The Future of the Community Welfare Sector”. In that speech Tony argued strongly for a change to the current paradigm of government contracting for society’s needs, “driving for greater efficiency, and further professionalising, regulating and circumscribing care”. (p3) For the community of the welfare sector, this way of doing things has to change, he claimed. The reality of continued reduced government funding driven by the need for greater efficiencies will be the undoing of the sector. Prophetic indeed.

Like Tucker, Tony Nicholson was not just making the case for sustainability. His strong theme throughout this landmark paper is what is lost when the power of the voluntary contribution of the broader community is diminished, if not wiped out. In that demise we lose a community sense of responsibility, and the organic locally-raised network of connections made for the common good of that community. In other words, the caring heart of a gathered community is lost because the conduits and processes to gather in commonality don’t exist.

More particularly, we can now ask, can the Brotherhood of St Laurence reappropriate the founding passion of Tucker to galvanise communities into caring for each other?

It requires a huge shift – but it seems to me that the Brotherhood is better placed than many welfare organisations to do so. I make this claim because of the narrative of the Brotherhood itself – the distinctive prophetic awareness and action in its history, and the continuing high regard of Melbourne people (and beyond) for its work and presence. These are strong building blocks.

The shift required is as, Tony says, of paradigm enormity. That is, to shape a new community development model for service delivery. This is not merely a stronger focus on building up ‘feel good’ volunteer engagement. This is not, either, the discarding of involvement with governments, which have an inherent responsibility in care of our citizens. Rather, the shift required is into mutual engagement and a shared responsibility culture.

It is about community engagement, and a holistic approach that presumes community responsibility for what happens to itself. This is not about reactive solutions to one problem or need, for example, let’s go and look after all the gardens of the old people. We are looking to help each other listen to each other, to notice what is happening in our neighbourhood, and to create frameworks of communication and decision-making that respect and honour each voice and contribution of that neighbourhood. This culture of responsibility will need to build on and create relationships and networks with resources and service providers that are just that – relationships.

As Tony Nicholson asks..... can the professionalised community sector re-orient to connect to communities in this way? We can ask the same question of the church, of the local faith communities as well. That is, can we together create a relational, local framework of operation that rests in mutual responsibility and harnesses the good in community, for the common good? How do we bring the fullness of life promised in Christ into all our processes of living, as well as outcomes?

The parish partnering ministry of the agencies and church are moving into that arena, with the shift to processes of collaboration and mutual dialogue. The Brotherhood has launched this year a landmark workbook, “Approaches to

Community Engagement”. It contains the paradigm of new directions for the way the Brotherhood engages with community – and outlines the huge risks involved. These include concern for staff in the need for new skills and new ways of doing things; for the loss of control, and the needed flexibility, with a community-driven agenda; and for the long term commitment that is needed for relational processes in mutual responsibility. Significantly, the question is asked... “do we value collaboration?” p3

Into this challenge a partnership project is emerging in the Brotherhood, “The Good Neighbourhood Project”. As we work on what I believe could become the Brotherhood’s signature tool of parish and community partnering, we are intentionally focussing on mutual capacity discernment and enabling. Also, for the long term commitment of relationship for as long as needed, but not in dependency. It is exciting, and I believe reclaims Tucker’s missional heart for stirring up people to help people, to help each other.

It also sits well with this Diocese’s emerging vision into reality for mission shaped structures; again moving into that culture of low control, high accountability and training and equipping people as mission enablers. So there are some exciting synergies coming together in Holy Spirit timing – and at the heart of all of this movement is the call to listen and notice what is happening around us, and (in Tucker’s words) do something about it. The key process is discernment, and together the Brotherhood and church are developing significant discernment processes based on mutual capacity strengthening.

Finally, I believe there are other prophetic passions of Tucker’s we need, church and agency, to consider for reclaiming.

Tucker was a wily strategist, always seeking the way to get things done around the perceived obstacles of institutional structure, politics and church. A significant strategy was to engage the passion for social justice at the ground level – and the Friends group was the key force in this. We need to empower again this localised force for the advocacy of social justice as Anglicans and community together. Tucker’s plan was effective – one by one, group by group, he gathered momentum to the point where the church leaders and political leaders knew that that they could

take up the baton on behalf of the voice of the people. This requires a communication strategy that unifies as well as informs – another key Tucker tactic.

This collective gathering of social justice voice needs to live alongside community action. It cannot be voice alone. This is not denying the significant number of parishes engaged with their communities in this way – faith with action - as well as the work of the Brotherhood itself. For parishes though, Tucker argued that this has to be their main identifier – that people would be attracted to a place that was getting things done for the good of the community. In his final theological treatise he wrote that such a parish...

“would get more, far more, than it gave – and it would become a living influence in the lives of the community in and around it.” p204 Handfield _____

Tucker’s starting point was his faith lived through the church, as indeed it was his life. With prophetic passion he kept looking beyond current horizons to find ways the church could enable Christ’s identity to be fully known. His passion to reform the church through social action is even more valid today. The local church needs to re-emerge as the trusted space, embedded in the whole of the community it is part of, creating relational networks of care and goodness for each other. The Brotherhood’s gift of enabling such community hub building is wonderful partnering; together we can imagine and create neighbourliness for a world crying out for ways of gathering and creating human goodness together.

I believe Gerard Tucker would embrace the new direction the Brotherhood is courageously exploring. He would continue to remind us all though, as he probably marched out the door because he saw something that needed to be done, in the words of the prophet Tobit (which are appropriately read on St Laurence Day 10 August)...

“Remember, do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor, and the face of God will not be turned away from you.”

So be it. Amen.

Venerable Jan Crombie
Archdeacon, Parish Partnerships
Anglican Diocese of Melbourne