



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Book of Genesis begins with the lovely reality of God's Spirit hovering over the surface of the deep, with the imminent creation gathered beneath the Spirit's brooding caress - an image which Jesus Himself repeats in his lament over Jerusalem: 'How often would I have gathered your people as a hen gathers its chicks.' I say 'lovely reality' because that is what it is, literally and theologically: the purest, loveliest reality of God's creating our world of and for Himself, and of course for us and all God's creatures.

This intimate experience of the Spirit in the world is central to many aspects of Chinese religiosity, and it is no surprise therefore that the Anglican Province of Hong Kong embodies a very full theology of the Holy Spirit - a theology which finds its greatest expression through the sense of community and fellowship much beloved of Chinese Christians and deeply expressed in Hong Kong's many Anglican institutions. Whether it is the Church's Welfare Council, which disburses more than HK\$ 1 billion a year in support projects; or the Province's more than 140 Church schools at every level of provision; the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui's understanding of its mission for care and stewardship in God's creation is always founded in that same experience of God's real presence as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It is an experience that ranges across more of our beliefs about creation than solely life in the Spirit, however. Chinese Anglicans believe in community and fellowship because, as Genesis 3 tells us, we are called to be God's companions; and we believe that being God's true companions is the fount of our deepest expressions of being companions with one another. We care for one another, therefore, because God cares for us, just as the Father is the truest parent to the Son and Jesus Christ is our Shepherd and our Good Samaritan, healing us and bringing us home again to oneness in the Trinity.

This care for one another must also mean care for the society in which we live, however, a charge that sits heavily on Hong Kong. The City faces enormous challenges to do with housing, clean water, environmental protection, ecological and bio-diversity, and climatic pollution. In these respects Hong Kong is particularly vexed by its situation: not only as part of the most populous nation on earth - China - in the most economically diverse continent - Asia - but also as a port on the shores of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. These are realities that must be faced and addressed as constructively as possible, something that the Anglican Church of Hong Kong seeks to do by always engaging with civil and political society. In a city like Hong Kong there is no future in being outside of these discussions: truly caring for our city and our part of creation means being part of the way forward and part of its future. Our mission is to God's Kingdom in the midst of this world: being God's companions means walking these same streets and living in these endlessly crowded communities, with and for one another.

There are some very good examples of how our Church lives this mission in Hong Kong. Service institutions like the Welfare Council and Saint James' Settlement are deeply involved in the Government's efforts to eliminate sub-standard housing and to deliver clean drinking water to all members of society. Every Church school places great emphasis upon teaching younger generations about the urgent need to care for the natural environment and actively to reduce climatic pollution, just as the Church itself quietly but insistently engages with local and central government in the effort to reverse global warming and manmade climate change. On more intimate levels the Church is constantly seeking to ameliorate the hardships of peoples' daily lives, be that through such projects as the HIV Education Centre and HELP for domestic workers at Saint John's Cathedral, or the work of the Mission to Seafarers in taking Word and Sacrament to the thousands of ship-bound workers who populate Hong Kong's harbour. Each of these missions, and others, takes place every day: they are a constant expression of our companionship with The Lord and our recognition of

praying and working for the realisation of God's Kingdom.

Some of these features of our Church's mission to Hong Kong are characteristic of living and believing in a crowded city with all of its challenges and particular difficulties. One would not expect to draw lessons, still not directions, for Christian life from Hong Kong and insist that they apply, for example, to the Church in Zambia or Bolivia: that would be imperialistic far more than contextual and not in any way companionable. I do believe, however, that there are some of our experiences in Hong Kong that might be encouraging for others, and which may speak to a wider inhabited world than solely our own.

The first thing to say is just this: we must always engage. We can never say that these or those problems are only for government or civil society or business and industry. Being God's companions means not leaving our responsibilities to others, however effective they may appear to be. Being God's companions means always hearing His words of commission and always returning to the creation He has gifted us with the strongest possible sense of pastoral care and activity. In religious terms, we are always embodied souls; and our bodies are always of and in every dimension of this world of ours. A failure to engage is a failure to hear God's call.

The second thing I want to say is very typical of the outlook of Chinese Christians: we must always engage optimistically and with real hope. If care is the outward and visible sign of the love we share in Christ, then hope is the outward and visible sign of the life of the Spirit in us. We are not born again to fail. We are not resurrected to witness to destruction. We are not called to worship a Dead Son but the Living Lord. His glory and victory are always our hope and our joy and we must never forget, as we engage with the world and for the world, that Christ is always going before us and always leading us to new life. This creation will be sustained and renewed. This life will be redeemed. This world will be healed. This Kingdom will come and God's will WILL be done. Nothing is more certain. Nothing is more urgent. Nothing demands our commitment and work so much as the realisation of this companionship with God.

Finally, I want to return to where I started: we must engage, and we must hope, TOGETHER: for it is together that we are called to live with God and to rejoice in God as He lives with us. The Anglican Communion is a wonderful, dare I say it, unique expression of this theology: a family of peoples and Churches around the world that come together and live and work and believe together not because we are compelled to but because we want to; because it is who we believe we are in and with The Lord. For some years now we have been realising this special character through the several Anglican Networks, which embody faith, hope, and love, to so many Christians around the world. That is hope. That is engagement. That is caring for creation, and that is what we must do and continue because there is no greater reward than to be God's People. It is what Micah means by walking humbly with our God, and what Jesus lives in every moment of His life. May it always be every Anglican's dearest wish to step out on that same path, together.

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