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THE LAST SAY

Final Sermon by the Reverend

Lance R. Shilton

as Rector of Holy Trinity Church, Adelaide

on Sunday, 25th November, 1973

Rector from 1957 to 1973

THE LAST SAY

Final sermon by the Reverend Lance R. Shilton, B.A., B.D., Th.L., as Rector of Holy Trinity Church, Adelaide, before going to Sydney to become Dean of St. Andrew's Cathedral.

Trinity Sermon No. D 76

National Library of Australia Card number and ISBNs

for this address: 0 86945 076 X

for this series: 0 86945 914 7

Published November, 1973 by the

TRINITY PUBLISHING SOCIETY

87 North Terrace,

ADELAIDE, South Australia, 5000

a non-profit organisation within Holy Trinity Church, working for the extension of the Gospel by Christian literature.

THE LAST SAY

It was over six months ago that I announced my resignation as Rector of Holy Trinity Church to take up my new appointment as Dean of Sydney. Since then I have progressively been doing things in this church for the last time. A few weeks ago I took my last wedding (I think the 1,600th). I spoke at my last Guest Service here (the 90th). I gave my last Wednesday night Bible Study (the 700th). On Wednesday I recorded my last radio 'Meditation', No. 4,578. As I give my last sermon, I can imagine someone saying after hearing approximately 800, "This is the last straw!" I could call it "my last gasp". But I have decided to give this final sermon the title, "The Last Say".

I know that there have been the discerning ones among you who have said, "It's no use talking to the Rector. He always has the last say." But that's not altogether true. After all, I am married!"

It wasn't difficult to find a last text. I wanted it to sum up what my aim has been throughout my ministry here. I Cor. 2:2 - "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified" (A.V.)

T.E.V. - "I made up my mind to forget everything while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and especially His death on the Cross."

The Apostle Paul had already demonstrated earlier in his letter that Jesus Christ is both the power of God and the wisdom of God. The Jews may reject Him as a stumbling block and the Greeks reject Him as a ridiculous character. "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (I Cor. 1:18). Paul mentions the manner of his coming - it is not in lofty words but in weakness and in much fear and trembling. J. B. Phillips translates: "I was feeling far from strong; I was nervous and rather shaky."

Several people have remarked to me that they can remember my Induction Service to this church in 1957, and as I walked down the aisle they thought to themselves, "Surely this is not our new Rector! He looks so small, so pale and so young - he's only a boy!" I'm thankful that first impressions are not always right. At least I had that in common with the Apostle Paul. And if I may presume to say so, I have something else in common with him. The content of my message is the same, for "I am determined not

to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." That is the heart of the Gospel. Christ's crucifixion was not the demise of a deluded daydreamer or the execution of a nationalist liberator, or the supreme sacrifice of one devoted to duty, but the Son of God Himself paying the penalty of our sins, Who rose again from the dead for our justification, Who ascended into Heaven, to the place of authority and power, and Who is enthroned as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, is the core of Christian communication. Paul emphasised this when he said to the Corinthian Christians, "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (I Cor. 1:18).

With this introduction I want to base the rest of this final address to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, on Paul's words to his fellow-Christians in Corinth.

1. MY THANKS:

I Cor. 1:4 - "I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus." It has been a great privilege for my wife and myself to be associated with you in the outreach of the Gospel. This church of Holy Trinity has become the largest Anglican Church in Australasia with an influence far beyond the city boundaries. This would not have been possible apart from the wholehearted co-operation of clergy and laity in concerted prayer and action. There have been times when a few have preferred to dream their dreams than to see their visions, who have cautiously held on to things as they were rather than to venture with faith into the unknown. But now we have unity without uniformity, conviction without compromise, love of each other without sentimentality, and witness to others without arrogance or fear, so that together clergy and laity, young and old, thank God for the privilege of being co-workers for Him. The only gap which exists is the re-generation gap - between the once born and the twice born, and God alone can correctly distinguish the two.

My thanks to all the clergy who have served with me - those now serving in other parts of Australia and other parts of the world, and those at present on the staff. We have always enjoyed warm fellowship together as a team and shared with each other in loving concern. My thanks to all the lay people who have seen their functions as a calling from God, particularly those on the

full-time staff. As I have spoken at conferences in other places I have endeavoured to make this point clear that the work of the layman is not as is commonly supposed, to help the clergyman do his work; but it is the responsibility of the clergyman to help the layman make his witness effective in the world. I am thankful to say that lay Christians are not considered 3rd-rate Christians, with missionaries and ministers in the 1st and 2nd places, but their calling is from God. Part of that responsibility is serving God through the church itself. How thankful I am that so many in this congregation, both directly and indirectly, are actively involved in effective witness through the mass media. How thankful I am that so many share in the pastoral responsibilities in caring for the sick and the aged, the indifferent and the newcomer. How thankful I am for the consistent service of those who teach children and adults in the educational programme. How thankful I am for all who dedicate their musical talents to the glory of God. My thanks to all who have stood loyally behind me at times of public controversy or have themselves been prepared to stand up and be counted. My thanks!

2. MY TESTIMONY:

The preaching and the writing of St. Paul were based upon his personal experience of Christ. For the Christian faith was more than a religious search, or an academic exercise, or a moral philosophy; it was a transforming experience of the grace of God. Listen to his words from I Cor. 15 - "Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the Gospel, in which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received Last of all he appeared also to me by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain" (vv. 1,3,8,10).

I came to you with a personal experience of God's saving grace in my life. This has been fundamental to all my preaching, writing, teaching and pastoral care. I was born, baptized and confirmed as an Anglican. I attended church and Sunday School every Sunday. Only rare times of sickness has prevented me from attending church every Sunday. I was first taken to church in a pram; walked for ten minutes each Sunday as a boy; rode a pushbike as a vicar in Melbourne, and just walked in from the Rectory next door since being Rector of this church, and I intend to worship God on Sundays with other believers until I die. But in my teenage years it became boring. My religion was formal. My beliefs

were borrowed and my life was mixed up. I honestly thought that Christianity and misery went together, and that ministers had to be very reverent and give up everything in life that was exciting and interesting. At 17 it was pointed out to me that the Christian life was joyful not miserable, demanding not boring, and adventurous not dull, and that the key to this new life was found in a personal relationship with Christ. Very simply and sincerely I received Jesus Christ as my Saviour and asked Him to control my life. Then I realized that He had forgiven my sins and had promised the power of the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life. This was the beginning of a pilgrimage for Christ full of joy and peace in believing with challenge and opportunity in serving. This life became full of purpose. Death lost its sting. Eternal life became a personal experience.

Perhaps that explains why my emphasis has been upon evangelism. I have always wanted to share with others what has meant most to me. There's only one joy comparable to that of coming to Christ oneself, and that is being used by God to bring another person to Him. That's my testimony.

3. MY VOCATION:

The apostle Paul was always conscious of his particular vocation. Right at the beginning of his first letter to the Corinthians he said, "Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus." Each Christian is called of God to serve Him and it varies from person to person. For me it was a vocation to the ministry of the church. It came 4 years after my conversion while serving in the army. It was clear and challenging. After much earnest prayer, confirmation from the Scriptures and from conversation with Christian friends, in faith I obeyed God's call. I had left school at 14 years at the end of the economic depression years. To answer God's call I needed to start preparing by correspondence to qualify for entrance to theological and university study. I had no money. I had no training in public speaking or debating. But God had called. Certain verses of Scripture which had been meaningful to me earlier in my Christian life kept coming back to strengthen the irresistible urge within me to answer God's call. Proverbs 3: "Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." The words of Christ Himself - "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you."

After the war I entered Ridley College, Melbourne, where I proved the grace of God time and time again, and experienced His provision in so many practical ways. Then came the eve of my ordination. An overwhelming sense of unworthiness came upon me but I had been called. I could never doubt that fact. Another verse of Scripture came to me as gracious encouragement from God as I read, "God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of love and power and a sound mind." I have often passed that verse on to other young ordinands including some who have heard God's call from this congregation. I thank God that a good supply of men has responded to God's call to the ministry from this church and are serving in dioceses throughout Australia. Others are at present at theological colleges. Men and women have also responded to God's call to missionary service and are serving amongst the aborigines and in other countries throughout the world.

I want to take this opportunity now of urging young people seriously to seek to know God's will for their life. It may be in the ministry of the church or in missionary service. There are many other more attractive opportunities for Christian service today where you will earn much more money, where you will have higher status in the community, where you are not tied to a lifetime commitment, but none with greater opportunity of reaching other people with the Gospel. Contrary to what many may think, the ministry of the church is demanding, fulfilling and effective. Don't be put off by the 'donkey' image given to clergy so often in the media. Don't be sidetracked by novel, untried alternatives. Don't refrain from responding because you think you are not worthy - no one is. Don't try to resist the leading of the Holy Spirit. Don't be afraid of being stifled by the so-called institutionalism of the church - where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

It's about time Christians stopped agreeing with the critics who are always knocking the church for what it is not doing, and started telling the world what Christians are doing. When recently I commented on a Monday Conference programme that the church was engaged in a multi-million dollar social service programme, the audience laughed me to scorn. They were so busy knocking the church that they remained ignorant of the facts.

The need for more men for the ministry is urgent. Some have left because of disillusionment, and yet the opportunities are increasing. Sometimes the expectations of the congregation of their minister are out of date. Demands are made beyond what is

reasonable. They expect the minister to do all that they neglect or are unwilling to do. They demand of him a higher standard of spirituality and morality than they demand of themselves, and when disappointed they criticize and complain. But the man called of God will fulfil his vocation whether praised by others or blamed, whether accepted or rejected. Like Paul, he knows that he is "called by the will of God". That is my vocation.

4. MY COMMITMENT:

The R.S.V. puts I Cor. 2:2 this way: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

This has meant more than preaching every Sunday, which I have made it a practice of doing at either morning or evening. This, I believe, has been valuable in maintaining continuous contact with the congregation. A city church should be a centre for clear preaching, not only by the clergy staff but also by outstanding laymen and preachers from interstate and overseas.

Guest Services were introduced over 16 years ago and 1,000 people of all ages have remained after these services as enquirers for further counselling. For the most part I have preached at these services myself, but on occasions there have been visiting preachers from interstate and overseas, such as the Revd. John Stott, Canon Michael Green, Dr. Paul White and Bishop David Sheppard, when he was here as an English Test Cricketer. On that occasion 1,400 people were present. Many of these people have come into a vital relationship with Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and are now serving in key positions in this church, in other churches in the diocese and in other parts of the world. True evangelism spreads in ever-widening circles, even to the uttermost part of the world. Because of the large turnover of people in a city church this programme of outreach has been maintained consistently and supported by a Public Relations programme through our own committee, and particularly through the effective use of mass media communication. Hundreds of hours of free time has been used on the radio and T.V. in broadcasting services, panel discussions, debates, meditations, epilogues and hymn singing sessions. Some of these have been broadcast throughout the Commonwealth of Australia, and some overseas. This outreach has also included the publication of books, pamphlets and sermons and Bible studies which have been distributed through the world, and now a tape ministry of sermons has been developed. Hundreds of hours in preparation and distrib-

ution have been involved, shared by a great team of voluntary workers who have given of themselves unstintingly in the Lord's service. The reason is that they, too, in a great team effort, were determined to convey the message of Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

Admittedly, some have come to this church and gone away disappointed. They were attracted in the first place by the friendliness, the efficiency, the liveliness, but the message was too biblical, too personal and too demanding. Some have left here to serve in local churches; some have remained to give sacrificial service.

Associated with the spiritual programme of evangelistic outreach was the necessity of a practical building programme to provide the essential facilities - offices, choir and clergy vestries, parish hall extensions and improvements, vergers' flat, 2 clergy residences outside the property, church galleries and extensions, and a well-equipped creche. This involved expenditure of well over \$100,000. Each building project was called a venture of faith to provide essentials, not luxuries, and to meet urgent needs. Much prayer went into the planning. Much prayer produced the finance. Much rejoicing resulted for all who co-operated in learning the lesson of faith. This wasn't money spent on ourselves; it was sacrificially given to extend the witness of the Gospel.

The great advantage of evangelism in a church context is that all the other facilities are available for building up in the faith those who have become Christians. The educational programme for all ages has been vital. As well as the Sunday Schools for children, the need for young people and adults to continue to learn from the Word of God and its relationship to their daily lives is also essential. Trinity Study Courses and mid-week Bible studies at the church and in the homes of church members have been blessed by God. The Trinity Publishing Society issues thousands of publications each year, and the library and book-stall for adults and children keep parishioners up-to-date with their reading.

Religious Instruction in schools has also been important, and we continue to do what we can. At the present time it is generally ineffective, at least until the new programme in South Australia is worked out and put into operation. Even though the old system of denominational instruction had its disadvantages,

nevertheless thousands of children in this State who had no other way of learning what being a Christian involved, heard something from the R.I. instructors. Some may not have been expert teachers, but the long term effect of their sincere Christian belief in the long run through prayer, meant something. This whole system was sabotaged by some denominations who refused to co-operate, and others who treated the opportunity with indifference. As a result "7 worse devils" are ready to fill the gap, such as the Gay Activists, the Secular Humanists and the Women's Liberation lobbyists, or selfish materialists.

No evangelistic programme can be maintained without pastoral care. This means counselling those who need spiritual help, welcoming those who are newcomers, visiting those who are sick in mind and body. It means looking after the aged and infirm, the young marrieds and those preparing for marriage. It means feeling for those who are hurt, comforting those who mourn, rejoicing with those who are happy, talking with those who are worried, being with those who are lonely, searching for those who have drifted and sharing with those who are guilty the message of God's love and power.

Youth and students need some special attention, although I have never believed that they should be isolated from the rest of the congregation. Some of their activities, such as fellowship meetings, house parties and camps are best organised by themselves for themselves, but other activities, such as parish family occasions, church services and study courses should express the oneness of the whole family of God. The generation gap becomes insignificant when the regeneration gap has been bridged by faith in Christ by younger and older alike. While it is time to say that the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow, I want to emphasise that the middle aged of today are the leaders of today in politics, commerce, communication, the church and the home. That's the age group where the concentration should be.

No individual Christian or Christian congregation can fulfil his evangelistic commission to go into all the world with the Gospel unless there is an awareness of relevant social and moral issues. I have been in the midst of many controversies while in South Australia, not by choice but by necessity. My Christian conscience has left me with no alternative but to speak out through the media and through this church. I have often been maligned, misjudged and misrepresented by those whose only defence is the use of emotive words, abusive name-calling and deliberate

fabrication. I can honestly say that the motive for my stand is a deep concern for the long-term welfare of all people. How can you claim to love God with all your being if you fail to love your neighbour when the tests are applied? Like others in the congregation, the decision to stand up and be counted is already made - we can do no other. One thing has continued to encourage me. Behind me there has always been the congregation of Christians here at Holy Trinity, loyally supporting, faithfully praying and actively working, and wholeheartedly sharing. What a unique fellowship this has been, culminating in the great Festival of Light occasion in Adelaide and the rest of Australia. My commitment has been your commitment.

5. MY ADVICE:

The Apostle Paul had to deal with all kinds of problems within the church and outside it. There were questions regarding marriage, money, divisions, moral issues, social problems, speaking in tongues and personal relationships. More heavily than the afflictions from those outside the church who were ready to discredit, abuse, persecute or kill him, there weighed upon his mind the care of all the churches. That's why he presumed to offer his advice. I'm no St. Paul, and you haven't the problems which first century Christians had, but I am presuming to give my advice on how to go on as Christians and how to become more effective in Christian witness through the church. Here are 18 points:

- (1) Effective delegation means not having everything in your own hands but having your finger on the pulse;
- (2) Details are important but they should not sidetrack your main purpose or absorb a disproportionate amount of the available time;
- (3) Be careful about your personal and public relationships and don't presume upon the Christian grace of others;
- (4) Be stimulated from outside the limits of your own environment through serious reading, wide travel, discriminate use of the media and critical discussions;
- (5) Don't expect others to work harder than yourself;
- (6) Don't put money in the first place. Find out what God's will is and act responsibly;
- (7) Be authoritative but not authoritarian by basing your leadership on the principles of God's Word and not on

the status of your position;

- (8) Peace within yourself does not mean peace at any price outside yourself;
- (9) Work as if all depends upon you and pray as if all depends upon God;
- (10) Encourage others to stand firm for their faith, but set the example yourself;
- (11) The lessons of faith are learned by progressive experience and not by continual observation;
- (12) Be loyal to those who work over you, under you or beside you;
- (13) Don't allow nervousness to prevent you from doing God's Will;
- (14) Don't make "a thing" of any special point of doctrine, however important it may be. Endeavour to keep the whole counsel of God;
- (15) Remain aware of the thinking of non-Christians and nurture their friendship;
- (16) Walk by faith and not by sight. As one step of faith leads into sight, be ready for the next step of faith;
- (17) Obey your conscience but make sure that it is enlightened by the Word of God and inspired by the power of God;

In giving this advice to you, I remind myself how often I have failed to take it myself. Therefore, I must add another point:

- (18) Keep coming back to God for forgiveness for the past, power for the present and direction for the future.

6. MY PRAYER:

My prayer for you who have shared my determination to know nothing except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, is also in the words of St. Paul that "the grace of the Lord Jesus be with you. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus" (I Cor. 16:23,24). The fellowship of prayer will continue throughout the years to follow. I shall pray for you in the great opportunities which are opening up before you in new ventures of faith. I shall pray for your new Rector that he may be given love and power and wisdom. I feel

confident that you will pray for me in the responsibilities before me in another place.

For years now, I have had framed in my study this prayer of St. Augustine, and with it I conclude. Let it be yours and mine.

"To my fellow-men - A heart of love;
To my God - A heart of flame;
To myself - A heart of steel."

"The grace of Christ be with you all."

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