

St George's Cathedral

Sunday 30th January 2011, Christian Unity Week

The Rt Revd Suheil S. Dawani

I greet each and every one of you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ welcoming you, brothers and sisters, to this Anglican Cathedral of St George the Martyr.

On my day of installation as the fourteenth Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem four years ago, I announced the establishment of a new department for Peace and Reconciliation in the Diocese of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East. This emerged from a conviction that we must be ministers for peace and reconciliation in this world.

Reconciliation, dear friends, is more than a word. It is an event, an experience, which should involve a person completely. It becomes a way of life.

Reconciliation should be the word we use to describe the Church. It sets forth the very nature of the Church. Christ our Lord is the mediator between God and man. The Church is an assembly of people who have been brought close to God and to a real and vital relationship with him.

Reconciliation brings a word of correction to the Church. The need for correction was paramount in the life of the Church at Corinth. This word of correction is needed, for a congregation cannot give good witness for Christ when it does not submit to Christ as the Head of the Church.

Reconciliation is a word of direction, for the church needs direction to restore the ministry of reconciliation which we have often forgotten. The Church needs a word of direction to see the needs of humanity. It must reach out to the poor, the sick, the depressed, the ignorant, and the oppressed with hands of understanding, compassion, support, and mercy. We cannot fulfill our calling as ministers of reconciliation by remaining neutral. The New Testament teaches that the absence of evil never makes us good. In the story of the Good Samaritan, the Priest and the Levite committed no evil against the robbed and beaten man, but their inactivity, Jesus tells us, was, of itself, evil.

We have this ministry of reconciliation. We have the message and the Gospel. God has entrusted us with this message. We are to deliver this message verbally and to fulfil the Gospel with acts of compassion. We have His promise that He is working with us. The question remains, are we working with Him?

'God reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.'

The word reconciliation is coming back into our spoken language, perhaps because of our modern human experience. Divisions and broken relationships are everywhere. There is no 'one' world. It is a divided world. We are witnessing injustices, oppression, and acts of violence against innocent people. Areas of human activity feel the influence of misunderstandings. Many homes are broken, so are many nations. The need for reconciliation is great whether in our region or in other parts of this world.

The Gospel tells us that this is the function and purpose of Christ, to reconcile the world unto God. Christ restores us and reunites and brings us back to our Lord. It is true that the cross of Christ reveals the Love of God and the grace of God. It means that God goes the whole way in reconciliation. It is no wonder that the cross breaks the hearts of sinful men who know the awfulness of their own guilt.

The true way to reconciliation comes first by being reconciled to thy brother and then coming and offering thy gift. Jesus is saying that the Christian should take the initiative in reconciliation as a means of breaking down the barriers of enmity. Jesus is saying that Christian reconciliation is a prerequisite to fellowship with God and with each other. This principle applies to all God's people whether Christian, Jew, or Muslim. We must accept and respect the 'different other' so that all people will be treated equally with full dignity and justice.

'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'

Finally, the scripture tells us in Luke 9:49 that we are tolerant when we recognize our differences and agree to be different. We must see ourselves as children of God first and as human beings second. We must practise love towards those with whom we disagree.

This is the essence of reconciliation and an important component of our faith. Dear Friends, let us not love each other in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth. May the Holy Spirit empower us all to strengthen our unity and to lead us on, together, in the journey of faith.

Amen.