

**SERMON DELIVERED AT THE ANZAC SERVICE
IN CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL, NEWCASTLE
SUNDAY 21ST APRIL 2013 AT 6PM
BY THE RIGHT REVEREND DR PETER STUART,
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This time last week, Newcastle Anglicans were coming to terms with the news that the Anglican Synod had not elected a new Bishop of Newcastle.

A Synod is a demanding process. Over 300 people gathered for morning, afternoon and evening for the equivalent of two whole days in prayer, conversation, speech-making and voting. We will do it all again in September.

History is helpful here because it tells us that this is not Synod's first experience of difficult elections. The Sydney Morning Herald of 8 December 1927 reports that Synod met until 1am wrestling between two candidates before one conceded. In September 1930 the Synod was again electing because of the shock death of the bishop. The Sydney Morning Herald reported that after debating until 4am the Synod could not decide between two candidates. Synod had some new rules by this stage and gave the responsibility to a body called the Diocesan Council. The history of the Diocese written by AP Elkin suggests that the Diocesan Council wanted to get away from the two contenders and within a week had elected another person - Bishop Neville Stuart Talbot from Pretoria but who subsequently declined. Batty was then elected and served as bishop for 27 years.

The election of Neville Talbot attracted my interest. How could a Diocesan Council in Newcastle within a week have such confidence in a bishop from another country to elect them bishop?

Neville Talbot was one of three brothers. He served in the Boer War before returning to England and eventually commencing theological studies. In the First World War he and his younger brother enlisted. His younger brother Gilbert was killed at Flanders in July 1915. In December 1915 - Neville Talbot - serving as an army chaplain - worked with another priest - Tubby Clayton to set up a rest and recreation centre for service personnel in Poperinge called Talbot House in memory of Gilbert. The house quickly became known by its initials - TH but because in that war the call sign for the letter "T" was TOC, Talbot House was known as ToCH. It is in the actions of Neville Talbot and Tubby Clayton that an international movement centred in Christianity and promoting friendship, service, fair-mindedness and humility was born. The symbol of the movement being a lamp. The Upper Room of Talbot House was home to a simple chapel for all denominations - the altar being a carpenter's bench. In 1923, the Governor General of Australia, Lord Forster, wrote to Tubby Clayton indicating that he and his wife wanted give a ToCH lamp in memory of their sons who also were killed in World War 1. The movement decided that the lamp should be permanently enshrined in this Cathedral which became the spiritual home to the ToCH movement in Australia. This building bears witness to that enduring connection - the altar in that chapel is a replica of that carpenter's bench, a sculpture of Tubby Clayton's dog sitting underneath, an effigy of Forster's son in the Warriors Chapel and the lamp. History is helpful here - ToCH - Talbot House - Neville Talbot - we don't know all of the connections but somehow his election is not a surprising idea after all!

History tells us so much. On ANZAC Day there will be tour guides here at the Cathedral to help people remember how the Warriors or St Michael's Chapel was erected from generous donations, how we are custodians of flag which is the only surviving Australian battalion flag from WW1, how

the book of gold, to be brought in soon, is a precious gift enabling the remembering of those who died from this Diocese in the First World War.

History tells us so much but as a society which has become so used to the instant we are less its students than we have been. The internet gives us access to so much historical material but it can become undifferentiated from the news, ideas and opinions of the current day.

History tells us that people go to war for all sorts of reasons which at the time those in power believe are right. Sometimes it is kind to those decisions and at other times scathing. It tells us that in the wake of war men and women can, but have not always found, incredible compassion and care for those who have served in the theatres of war and their families. Toc-H, Legacy, the RSL, Vietnam Vets are leading groups which provide testament to the collegiality and support that can be offered. Yet we also know that these groups can wane as society changes - they can seek to reinvent themselves - sometimes successfully but sometimes not. In the 1920s, this Cathedral was an epicentre of remembrance and is so this week. One of our responsibilities with this heritage is to explore how we continue to assist this remembrance at all times as we pray and work for a world in which there is lasting peace.

The telling of history is a work of remembering. In the Jewish world of Jesus - remembering was the task of making real in our own time - the experience, the insights, the reality that is being called to mind - they become part of our time and our story by the act of remembrance. This is true for us at war memorials on ANZAC Day - we remember those who gave their lives for our freedom - they become part of our time and our story.

History can tell us so much if we are prepared to be its listeners and its students. We hear our story and sift through it to see that which is good and ensure that we claim those insights and ideas which should endure into the future. We call to mind people and places that they might shape us now.

I worry that we are not tellers of nor students or listeners of our history. This is not my only worry with history. As Australian history is told and heard I worry that there can be a tendency to downplay or diminish the positive contribution of religious groups and especially Christians to our society and culture. Christians, especially those in the mainstream church led initiatives in education, health and social welfare before each of them became the work of government. When government initiated social action it was often church groups that were willing to call forth and coordinate the local support to ensure that the programmes could be implemented. Quite rightly, a proper telling of the history speaks of horrendous and shocking abuse of power affecting individuals for life within the church. A proper telling can also speak of individuals given hope and direction. One truth should not erase the other. History is complex.

A full telling of history will remind us that the Christian contribution to this society and societies around the world is based on a generous act of sacrificial love for an undeserving people. As we heard in the reading from the letter of Paul to the Romans - Jesus reveals God's great love for humanity in willingly dying for us while we were ungodly, unrighteous and sinful. Christians believe that through faith and trust God has poured love into their hearts and they have been given an everlasting peace which sustains them in suffering. This love and peace in spite of all that may confront them compels the Christian to act with charity and grace towards others - friend and enemy.

The remembering of the Toc-H story reminds us of this. The carrying of a book made from the gold of jewellery of mothers, widows and fiances given in love reminds us of this. We are drawn to the sacrificial love of God through the sacrificial love of others.

In the telling of history and the story of this place we discover that one of the treasures is a ToCH rush light entrusted to us by those who were imprisoned in Changi. In the midst of the darkness of that place – the prisoners used the lamp and recalled the commitment to true peace, friendship, service, fair-mindedness, humility and generous love that offers charity and grace to all.

On this night we recall the sacrifice of many in theatres of war that we might live as a free people. We are able to worship, to have many religious views, to debate and disagree. Their sacrifice resulted in a great gift to us which we must remember in this and in this place. It must always be part of our story.

My prayer this night is that as we will never forget those who have gone before us, shaped by a society that was shaped by the Christian story. I pray that that we might honour their sacrifice and commit ourselves to the continued remembering that in its fullness allows us to offer charity and grace to all. My prayer is that this Cathedral and this Diocese will be agents of that remembering to the glory of God and the benefit of his people.