

A Sermon for The Sunday Morning Worship Service April 10, 2005
The Community Church,
Shanghai China

By
The Most Reverend Andrew S. Hutchison

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

It is a great privilege for me to come before you today and share the good news of Jesus Christ. I bring to you the very best wishes of the people of Canada who as sisters and brothers in Christ support our visit to you by their prayers.

In many ways our coming to you fulfils the words of the hymn:

In Christ there is no east or west,
In Christ no north or south,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.

The theme of that hymn and this sermon is mission and unity. Those words come together in our love for one another - the mark by which the world recognizes us as disciples.

I speak first on the theme of mission. There is a long and significant history of Canadians who have come to China. Dr. Norman Bethune was an amazing Canadian doctor whose unceasing and inventive work as a surgeon, teacher, founder and administrator of hospitals served the people of China. He had a spirit of absolute selflessness that inspired many others. He is highly honoured in both our countries.

I think also of William White who from 1909 to 1934 was the first Anglican Bishop of Honan. . Bishop White was consecrated as a Bishop by one of my predecessors Archbishop Matheson -- the fourth Primate of Canada at St. James Cathedral in Toronto. Bishop White began his ministry in 1896 in China and he clearly understood the need to show the love of Christ by being among the people. He took the name of Lu Guang - 'walking toward the light'. He started a new missionary district in Honan and was a man ahead of his time that understood the need for indigenous ministry. This was highlighted when he lobbied successfully to have a Chinese priest Philip Lindel Tsen succeed him as Bishop in Honan.

Bishop Tsen was the only non-Caucasian Bishop to attend the worldwide gathering of Anglican Bishops at the Lambeth Conference in 1930. We in the west have come to realize that mission work today involves two-way journeys with many Christians coming to North America to teach us, just as we once taught you. Bishop Tsen was a pioneer in coming to Canada to educate us. In 1959 his name along with that of the Japanese Bishop Paul Sasaki was placed in our calendar of holy people that we commemorate each year.

These two Bishops stood together at our General Synod in 1937 and bore witness to Christian unity, even though their nations were at war. Missionary work came full circle when we heard from these two Christian leaders who demonstrated holiness and confessed Jesus Christ as Lord.

In January of this year I received an honorary fellowship from Renison College at the University of Waterloo in the province of Ontario. A significant part of that ceremony was an award presented in memory of The Rev. Tim Oi (Florence) Li. Renison College has established The Florence Li Timo-Oi Memorial Centre to honour her life and ministry. Florence was the first woman ordained a priest in the Anglican Communion in 1944. She spent the last eleven years of her life in Toronto and served as an assistant priest at St. John's Chinese Church. She is also commemorated in our calendar of holy people. I had the honour of meeting Florence's sister, Rita Lee-Chui, at the ceremony and shared with her our appreciation of her sister's life and witness.

There are many others who have given so much to bring the good news of Jesus to those who do not know him. I thank God for their willingness to take up the cross and heed the Biblical words to "Go into all the world...."

I said earlier that mission work today involves two-way journeys. There is much from our visit that we will take back to Canada and share with our people. So much of what I have heard and seen during my time in China has reminded me of the New Testament book *The Acts of the Apostles*. That book is the story of the explosive growth of the early Church after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. A significant amount of the growth of the Church here in China follows the patterns established by the first disciples. The Church initially met as house churches where they experienced the word of God in faith, love and action. I know that house churches here have been a source of enormous strength and education to new Christians. They have provided places of worship and singing enabling people to serve God boldly. Sometimes our lives get very cluttered with many things and we forget how important it is for one Christian to tell another about God's love and care. I thank God for the courage and conviction of those who have formed, led and participated in this ministry. Many other vibrant new Churches are growing around the world based on the house church model. .

I also have been privileged to learn about the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. I know that at times it has been controversial, but so also were many decisions that are recorded in *The Acts of the Apostles*. Debates among Christians about how the Church should grow and develop go right back to New Testament times. From my perspective it is fascinating to learn of the work of Y.T. Yu and K.H. Ting and the China Christian Council. Many of us are accustomed to a complete separation of Church and state and have learned much from the accommodation between Christian believers and a socialist society. Together they seem to have discovered that dialogue, cooperation and seeking common ground while respecting differences is the best way to realize and maintain peace and mutual respect.

The three principles of self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating are all elements of the life of the Church found in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

Self-government and self-support are essential for building up the Church in China. Our earliest missionaries, as we do today, recognized that people should be given control of their own churches and of their finances including the responsibility for supporting them.

Our response to the tremendous growth of the church in China is one of heartfelt thanksgiving for what God has done. At the same time, we must recognize that the growth will present an incredible challenge to stay focused on the gospel mandate of mission and to develop self-governing principles that contribute to continued growth and not to stagnant bureaucracy.

The self-supporting aspect of the three-self-movement also represents an emerging test for the Church. The socialist market economy has created new financial opportunities but the building of churches and theological training, to name just two areas, are expensive to develop and maintain.

The third task of self-propagation is one that you understand well. Many of you are already involved in evangelism, church building, pastoral training and the nurture of new Christians. There may be areas of mutual interest and development that the Canadian and Chinese Churches can work at together. Perhaps, as is recorded in *The Acts of the Apostles*, churches from China and Canada should, in letters and visits, suggest ways of sharing the good news so as to strengthen the witness of each of our churches.

The hymn that I mentioned at the beginning has as its last verse:

In Christ now meet both east and west,
In Christ meet south and north:
All faithful souls are joined in one
Throughout the whole wide earth.

Those words reflect what we share so wonderfully together -- a unity in Jesus Christ as our Resurrected Lord and Saviour. Christians around the world are celebrating the Resurrection. For all of us it is the great sign that in Jesus Christ all the barriers between us have been broken. As St. Paul says so beautifully in the letter to the Galatians,

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

Each and every person is equally loved and valued because Christ died for all. Jesus, before his death prayed that we might know and experience that unity that he enjoys with God the Father and the Holy Spirit.

I thank you for the honour of being with you and sharing in the good news of God. My prayer for you is that the Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen you. May the faith that you have continue to inspire you to evangelism so that all may know the grace that God has given us in his Son Jesus Christ.

I know that I speak for all of our delegation when I say thank you for your Christian hospitality and gracious welcome. In closing I would also like to ask a favour of you. Please pray for the Church in Canada. We face many challenges and need the support of our worldwide Christian family to help us be all that God has called us to be. Together we are stronger when we reflect the unity that Jesus has called us to in order as he said, "That the world may believe" Amen.