

*the Body of Christ*  
a sermon preached on the  
*thirteenth sunday after pentecost*  
19 August 2018  
at  
*st john's*  
ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL  
*by father richard wilson*

the lections: Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 34; Ephesians 5:11-21; John 6:51-58.

In 2017 an Australian grassroots political group called A24 conducted a survey on what Australians want as a vision of Australian community. A24 is an alliance of civil society activists/leaders and organisations, from environmental NGOs, to social justice organisations, faith groups, unions, academics and the community. They asked people like single mothers, migrant communities, indigenous Australians and community groups in the suburbs, people we would call some of the marginalised, how they saw an Australian community for all.

They came up with a vision called Australia Remade based on nine pillars – their words not mine – of community formation. The pillars include: celebration of indigenous culture; connection with land and the environment; an economy that serves people, not the reverse; recognition of every person's contribution to society; celebration of diversity; flourishing communities; valuing the contribution of women; a democracy where government serves the people, and contribution of this nation for the good of the world.

This is a social vision of the nation that might well have been written by a public theologian, who wanted to avoid churchy jargon, and indeed I see it as resonant with Anglican social theology – a public theology initiative in the Church of England which is slowly making its way around the Anglican communion. In particular we can relate, I believe, to its social vision, and to its preferring of the needs of the marginalised over the preferences of privileged elites. And its spirit of compassion.

The language of pillars is suggestive of building and we use it in the church. I remember as a small boy hearing my grandmother referred to as a pillar of the Church of England – St Mark's Redcliffs in north western Victoria, although I wouldn't have known at the time what it meant. And we heard today in the Hebrew Scriptures in the term 'the Seven Pillars of Wisdom', the supports on which Wisdom has built a house. Although you are forgiven for thinking first of the book of the same name by T.E. Lawrence.

Proverbs is vague about what these pillars are specifically, but John's gospel is quite clear about their foundation – to continue the building imagery – and the foundation is Christ's body which is the bread of life. Jesus says 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.' We are the body of Christ and it is on him as our foundation that we build our community.

We have been in an interregnum now for sixteen months, and as always happens there has been some sense of things being 'on hold'. But that finishes this week with the induction of Fr John Baldock and I think we should be excited by the prospect of a new leader, a new shepherd. I have no doubt that Fr John will be a builder of the Body of Christ.

I cannot speak for him, but I would expect he will revisit the mission action plan. This is the strategy of the parish, the expression of how this community realises its vision and call to be the Body of Christ. This is something to be done by the whole community as a community; it is a vision that should hear the voices of all people, especially those on the community's margins.

It is not a strategy that entrenches the preferences of a small group of people, or seeks to transfix the vision in a time and place of history, but a vision that is responsive to the needs of the whole community. Fr John will need our support and love as our shepherd in order to take us from the place we are in to the next stage of the journey.

In the meantime, we have held together over the past sixteen months. It has not always been easy as we have discovered things about how community is made and unmade. This has been a long time, even for an interregnum, and has required the effort of all of us in some way or another. I want to acknowledge the contribution of the people who lead and volunteer in the great range of parish groups. I don't need to name them, we know who they are. I want to acknowledge those who have kept doing what they always do so that things just work.

But I am going to name some for their extraordinary efforts. I want to acknowledge the parish council who have had to work in difficult and unpredictable circumstances and Dawn Sullivan who has kept the administration going often alone and in uncertainty. Also the Incumbency committee who had the complex and exacting job of discerning who will be our next shepherd.

Finally, knowing that I will have left some people out, I must name some people who have stepped into leadership roles they might not have expected and who have done an extraordinary amount of work in order to keep things running smoothly: Wendy Crouch, Kerry Pratt and Glenis Heath as wardens, and Muriel Porter and Ross Smith who have attended to the liturgy week by week, especially for Ken and me.

Thank you. You have kept this ship of fools afloat.