

Jerusalem Declaration  
*Tim Anderson 8/1/2023*

Today we are looking at the Jerusalem Declaration.  
I've been preaching regularly in churches for 21 years.  
This is the first time in those 21 years,  
that I've chosen to preach on something  
other than a passage of Scripture.  
So it's not something I do lightly.  
But it is something I do for a reason.  
The Jerusalem Declaration is a statement of faith.  
That is it's something like the Nicene Creed  
that we regularly say in church on Sundays.  
Or like the 39 Articles that are in the back of our prayer books  
and describe the Christian belief of the Anglican Church  
formulated in 1562.  
No statement of faith comes out of nowhere.  
There is always a point of controversy  
that gives people a reason to write a statement of faith.  
The Nicene Creed came out of a controversy  
about the relationship between the God the Son and God the Father.  
Did God the Son exist from eternity past  
or was he the first creation of God the Father?  
That was an issue that was splitting the church in the 4th century.  
And so they called a council,  
the council of Nicea.  
They came to a conclusion.  
That Jesus was 'begotten not made of one being with the Father',  
and they wrote a creed.  
The 39 Articles are the same.  
There was a controversy.  
How is what we believe as Anglicans  
different from what Roman Catholics believe?  
The clergy and the bishops got together in London in 1562 to nut it out.  
And you have the 39 Articles.

Similarly the Jerusalem Declaration comes out of a controversy. Some parts of the worldwide Anglican Church have started to believe something very different from what the church has taught for 2000 years. Notice I said 2000 not 470.

This is a departure from historic Christianity not just a departure from historic Anglicanism. But some of the key matters of controversy are not covered in earlier creeds like the Nicene Creed or statements of faith like the 39 Articles.

Why is that?

The Bible is a big book.

It runs to 1500 pages.

Any 2 page summary is necessarily selective.

So you only cover the matters

about which there is disagreement in your day and age.

The matters of disagreement today were never discussed before because for 2000 years,

all of the Christian church across all denominations agreed about them.

So Anglican leaders around the world said to one another, we need to have another meeting

like the one in London 470 years ago,

like the one in Nicea 1650 years ago.

So Anglicans met in Jerusalem for the first Gafcon conference in the year 2008,

15 years ago.

And they put together the Jerusalem Declaration.

Since then around the world,

the Anglican Church is gradually splitting into 2 bodies.

One group of Anglicans are requiring their clergy to affirm the Jerusalem Declaration.

I think it's true to say that you can't be an Anglican minister in Nigeria unless you affirm the Jerusalem Declaration.

That is, their clergy have to sign off on it

in the same way I had to sign off on the 39 Articles

when I was ordained.  
In other churches, like TEC, in the USA,  
most of the clergy would deny  
much of what is in the Jerusalem Declaration.  
And in other Anglican churches like Australia,  
there is a situation of flux.  
Some churches affirm the Jerusalem Declaration,  
others don't.  
But the churches as a whole  
have not come down definitively one way or the other.  
So you effectively have two different belief systems  
operating side by side in the one church structure.  
It's my belief that this situation can't continue indefinitely.  
At some stage over the next couple of decades,  
we will be compelled to choose.  
There will be two versions of the Anglican Church.  
And we will have to decide which one we want to be in.  
This started last year with the formation of the DoSC.  
But it's not going to stop there.  
This is not a question  
that will only affect a couple of congregations in Brisbane.  
Eventually every diocese in the country  
will need to decide which way to go.  
And in dioceses like our own which are split right down the middle,  
it will probably be a parish by parish decision.  
If at some point we are going to be called on to make that decision,  
we need to know what the Jerusalem Declaration says.  
So here goes.

1. "We rejoice in the gospel of God  
through which we have been saved by grace  
through faith in Jesus Christ  
by the power of the Holy Spirit.  
Because God first loved us,  
we love him and as believers bring forth fruits of love,

ongoing repentance, lively hope  
and thanksgiving to God in all things."

And a representative Bible verse.

1 John 4:19 "We love because he first loved us."

If you thought the matters of controversy were going to be all about sex,  
you would be mistaken.

Fundamentally what is at issue is the nature of the gospel.

Is it about us reaching out to try to find God?

Or is it about God reaching out to us?

From cover to cover, the Bible says that it is the second one.

The Israelites were in slavery in Egypt,

and God appeared to Moses in the burning bush.

Moses didn't sit under a Bodhi Tree contemplating the nature of God,  
like Buddha.

Instead Moses was looking after his sheep minding his own business  
and God revealed himself to Moses in a burning bush.

Moses didn't ask for it.

He wasn't expecting it.

God took the initiative and revealed himself.

Jesus disciples were not having deep conversations with each other  
about the nature of God,

when they elected one of their number as a leader

and formed a new religion.

No. God came along in the person of his Son.

He approached them when they were minding their own business.

And he said, "Follow me."

God revealed himself.

So the point of controversy is,

"Is Christianity a religion focused on God's revelation of himself,  
particularly God's revelation of himself in the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Which is then unchanging because God has revealed it.

Or is it the product of human contemplation?

which is then changeable

because over time we have more opportunity to contemplate."

The Jerusalem Declaration says,  
 Christianity is about the gospel of salvation by grace through faith.  
 It's about God reaching out to us first,  
 and us responding to his revelation second.

Here's the danger signal you will hear when someone disagrees.  
 They will say, "The Holy Spirit is telling us something new today."

Which leads us to point 2 of the Jerusalem Declaration.

2. "We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments  
 to be the Word of God written  
 and to contain all things necessary for salvation.

The Bible is to be translated, read, preached, taught and obeyed  
 in its plain and canonical sense,  
 respectful of the church's historic and consensual reading."

And a representative Bible verse is 2 Tim 3:16

"All Scripture is God breathed  
 and is useful

for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."

When I was studying at Ridley College to be an Anglican minister,  
 they used to make us do what they called theological reflection groups  
 with the students and lecturers from Trinity College.

Trinity College is the other college that trains Anglican ministers.

It trains the ones who would certainly not affirm the JD.

I was in a group with one of the Trinity lecturers one session,  
 and he wanted us to reflect on a piece of the Hindu Scriptures,  
 the Bhagavad Gita.

He said to us,

"You know what the Bible says, 'All Scripture is inspired by God'.

That means all Scripture,

the Hindu Scriptures as well as the Christian Scriptures."

That man is now vicar of a parish in the Melbourne diocese.

The Jerusalem Declaration makes it plain what we mean  
 when we say Scripture.

It's the Old and New Testaments and nothing else.  
The JD also has a limit on what Scriptures are to govern.  
Some very conservative churches believe you should only do things  
that are actively encouraged in Scripture.  
So for example, they wouldn't have someone playing the keyboard  
for singing in church,  
because keyboards aren't an instrument mentioned in the Bible.  
And they wouldn't sing hymns or modern songs.  
They will only sing the Psalms,  
because the Psalms are the songs recorded in the Bible.  
The JD says Scriptures contain all things necessary for salvation.  
That means we find in them what we need to go to heaven.  
But we don't have to use them to determine  
what the allowable songs or instruments are for public worship.

Older confessions of faith like the 39 Articles  
or the Westminster Confession  
would mostly talk about the correctness of Scripture.  
Our Bible verse talks about the Scriptures being useful.  
That is, it's not just about ticking boxes to say that we believe it.  
We also need to use it.  
In the JD's words, we translate, read, preach, teach and obey it.  
In 2 Tim 3:16, we teach, rebuke, correct and train in righteousness.  
Either way, it's not just about saying we believe it.  
It's about using it.  
That's important at the moment.  
It's become quite the thing in churches  
to believe the Bible and not use it.  
There are so many leadership books out with 12 principles for success.  
As Anglicans we want to use the Bible,  
not the latest Christian self help book.

Points 3 & 4 of the JD  
are about where we stand in relation to older confessions.  
Is the Gafcon movement the start of a new religion

or a new denomination within Christianity?

The answer is no.

The Gafcon movement affirms all the founding Councils, Creeds and Confessions of the historic Anglican Church.

The Jerusalem Declaration may well speak to some matters where the earlier creeds and confessions were silent.

But we stand within the historic beliefs of Anglican Christianity.

We affirm everything in the creeds and the 39 Articles.

Of course that's not the case for revisionist Anglicans.

They don't believe everything in the creeds and the 39 articles.

Which leads us to point 5 of the JD.

"We gladly proclaim and submit to the unique and universal Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, humanity's only Saviour from sin, judgement and hell, who lived the life we could not live and died the death we deserve. By his atoning death and glorious resurrection, he secured the redemption of all who come to him in repentance and faith."

A representative Bible verse is Acts 4:12,

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

Revisionist Anglicans tend to believe that everyone's religion will save them, if they follow it sincerely, or that hell doesn't exist so there is nothing to be saved from, or that everyone will be saved even those who don't follow Jesus, they are all saved by Jesus, they just don't all know it.

That's not historic Christianity.

It's not what Peter meant when he said,

"Salvation is found in no one else,  
for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind  
by which we must be saved."

Following Jesus is the only way to receive the gift of eternal life.

We'll skip over points 6&7 and go straight to point 8  
which is the pointy end of the JD.

"We acknowledge God's creation of humankind as male and female  
and the unchangeable standard of Christian marriage  
between one man and one woman  
as the proper place for sexual intimacy and the basis for the family.  
We repent of our failures to maintain this standard  
and call for a renewed commitment to lifelong fidelity in marriage  
and abstinence for those who are not married."

A representative passage of Scripture is Mt 19:4-5

"Haven't you read," Jesus replied,  
"that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female'  
and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother  
and be united to his wife,  
and the two will become one flesh'?"

So this is the part that you will find no hint of  
in the creeds or the 39 Articles.

If you talk with revisionist Anglicans they will say,  
"The creeds only talk about the core matters of theology.  
Matters of ethics are secondary  
and Christians are free to disagree about them."

The Gafcon movement would disagree with that view.

We have already said that the Bible is to be obeyed.

We are not free to decide that some matters are secondary  
so we can do whatever we want to.

By acknowledging humankind as created male and female,

point 8 rules out transgenderism  
and a fluid spectrum of genders that you choose based on how you feel.  
Your gender is the way God created you not something you choose.  
By acknowledging marriage as between one man and one woman,  
point 8 rules out same sex marriage and polygamy and polyamory.

When it says 'we repent of our failures',  
this is an acknowledgement that in many places  
the church has grown lax in its teaching about marriage.  
In Australia, our community adopted no fault divorce in the 1970s.  
And the church has pretty much gone along with the community.  
Which is not to say that there are no proper grounds  
for a Christian person to seek a divorce.

Rather is it to say  
that we have stopped aiming for God's ideal of lifelong marriage  
and instead have taken on board the world's easy come easy go  
'marriage is for as long as you feel like it' attitude.

And in many places, the church has stopped teaching  
that cohabitation outside of marriage is wrong.

People who are living together who are not married  
come along to church and no one says boo.

I remember in the first church I worked in, St Matthew's Prahran,  
the young woman who was in charge of the Sunday School  
was living with her non Christian defacto partner.

My boss Greg was a new vicar,  
and clearly this matter had never been raised as inappropriate before.  
So Greg told this young woman that she either needed to get married  
or stop leading the Sunday School.

Up until that point, there had been a failure  
to maintain Christian teaching about marriage.

One of the consequences of that  
is that when same sex attracted people look on,  
they can say with some justification,

"You are picking on us.

You tell us we have to live according to the teaching of the Bible,

but you don't make heterosexual people do the same."  
 And so the JD says we repent of this failure.  
 God's standards are God's standards  
 and they apply equally to everyone.

Point 9 of the JD.

"We gladly accept the great commission of the risen Lord  
 to make disciples of all nations,  
 to seek those who do not know Christ  
 and to baptise, teach and bring new believers to maturity."

The Bible verse for this one is Mt 28:18-20

Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.  
 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,  
 baptising them  
 in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.  
 And surely I am with you always,  
 to the very end of the age."

It may strike you as strange,  
 that the great commission doesn't appear in any creeds or the 39 articles.  
 But it's not that strange actually.  
 These earlier documents were written to summarise what we believe.  
 I guess the JD is recognising  
 that sometimes you can believe the right stuff  
 and not get off your backside and do anything about it.  
 In many places in the West,  
 the church had become like a club for the members  
 instead of having any real focus  
 on reaching the lost with the message of salvation.  
 So this point is saying  
 that the core job Jesus has given the church to do until he returns  
 merits inclusion in our statement of faith.  
 What we do matters as well as what we believe.

And we are committing ourselves to getting off our backside and doing something about it.

We are running out of time.

We will skip over points 10-12.

But we have to cover point 13 because it too is the pointy end of the JD.

"We reject the authority of those churches and leaders

who have denied the orthodox faith in word or deed.

We pray for them and call on them to repent and return to the Lord."

A representative Bible verse is 1 Tim 6:2-4

"These are the things you are to teach and insist on.

If anyone teaches otherwise

and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ

and to godly teaching,

they are conceited and understand nothing."

The way the Anglican Church has operated

for the last couple of centuries

is that everyone basically minded their own business.

If you were a bishop of a diocese,

you did your best to serve the Lord Jesus by teaching the truth

and appointing good ministers to the parishes in your diocese.

And you didn't concern yourself

with what happened in the diocese next door.

It might seem like things were going a little out of whack,

but you trust in God to raise up a reformer,

and you content yourself with getting it right on your patch.

It was the great 'no no'

that you would interfere in someone else's diocese.

And the same goes for provinces.

The Anglican Church in Uganda would not interfere

with the goings on in the Anglican Church of Canada for example.

And look, when the matters at issue are what side of the communion table the minister stands on to celebrate communion, I kid you not, that was a big controversy 150 years ago, then it's probably not such a bad idea to live and let live.

But what point 13 is saying is that the issues that divide revisionist Anglicans and members of the Gafcon movement are not nitpicky small matters.

They are matters that separate Christians from non Christians.

And in this situation,

we have no choice but to set up alternative churches for faithful believers.

So in the US,

the ACNA was set up for faithful believers from TEC to migrate to.

And bishops from Rwanda and Uganda among other places ordained clergy and helped to set it up.

In Australia we have a retired Archbishop of Sydney who is taking episcopal oversight in the DoSC of two congregations that were formerly part of the Diocese of Brisbane.

You can imagine that the Archbishop of Brisbane is not overjoyed about that.

The Gafcon movement says,

"I'm sorry, you have denied the orthodox faith in word and deed.

We reject your authority."

What would it mean if Holy Trinity were to adopt the Jerusalem Declaration?

It would mean we affirm as a church the kinds of things I've said in this sermon.

The church is formed by God reaching out in love to save sinners.

God reveals his will in the Scriptures.

Jesus is the only way to be saved.

Humans are created male and female

and marriage is between a man and a woman.

The job of the church is to baptise and make disciples.  
And false churches and church leaders  
have no authority over God's people.  
If we adopt the Jerusalem Declaration we would be sending a signal  
that if the kinds of issues that occurred in Brisbane came to Melbourne,  
then we would be taking the kinds of actions  
that those two parishes took.  
It's highly unlikely to happen here.  
Melbourne is a far more orthodox diocese than Brisbane.  
But it lets people know where we stand.  
And that's important for some people when they choose a church to join.  
Is this a church that upholds historic Christianity,  
or a church that believes that 2000 years of Christian teaching  
is negotiable according to the fads of every generation?

Adopting the Jerusalem Declaration is something our PC is considering.  
If you have further questions either about the issues I have raised  
or about other matters in the JD I haven't had time to get to,  
I'm very happy to field your questions after the service or by email.  
If you have a point of view,  
you are welcome to express it to a member of PC.

Let me pray for us.