

WE NEED TRUE LEADERSHIP: 2013 EASTER MESSAGE

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Leadership is a hot topic this Easter. Not just because of recent developments on Capital Hill, but because we have new spiritual leaders in the Vatican and in Lambeth where the head of the Anglican Communion resides.

Water-cooler conversation around Canberra (and more broadly across our nation) has focused on events within Labor caucus in recent weeks. But we shouldn't overlook a much bigger story. Pundits suggest there is a genuine struggle within Federal Labor to define what the Party stands for in the 21st century. The underlying issue – we are hearing - is that the Union movement must rediscover its “call to action” in a language Gen X and Gen Y understands. This generation doesn't easily “join” organizations anymore, so the old forms no longer work.

The mainstream Churches find themselves at a similar cross-road because of the impact of similar social changes. This was clear last week as both the Roman Catholic Church and the worldwide Anglican Communion appointed and ‘anointed’ new leaders.

Good leaders hold two potentially contradictory tasks in balance: stay true to your core values; reinvent your mission for the new context. The greatest leaders answer this conundrum for each new generation.

This is true of Jesus, who sets the model for all Christian leaders, I believe. The task of Christian leadership is to proclaim with confidence the good news of Jesus Christ. But sadly, we often get distracted by negatives. I have been greatly encouraged that both Pope Francis and the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, understand this challenge. Their humble words and deeds have reminded the world that Christianity has a positive vision for human flourishing.

It is apt to use the lens of Easter to think more deeply about leadership because the ministry of Jesus radically reframes how we understand the concept.

Our culture has a tendency to confuse good management with good leadership, don't you think? From a Christian perspective, good leadership is ‘servant leadership’. Servant leaders should see the tools of management, such as good stewardship, tight procedures and greater efficiency, as a means to further the interests of other people.

The burden of servant leadership is captured so starkly by Luke in his Easter Passion narrative, as Jesus prepares to willingly leave his followers and take the journey alone that will end with his death on the cross:

He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done”... And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Over the past six weeks I have carried a 2.5 metre wooden cross from Eden, NSW, and will walk with it around Capital Hill at dawn on Easter Sunday. Many have asked me about the symbolism of this act. This is it: the story of Easter powerfully reminds us of the kind of commitment required to be a servant leader. Jesus freely chooses to sacrifice his life to save his followers. He literally bears the cross on our behalf. But most importantly, the story doesn't end there.

The truly wonderful message of Easter is that Jesus wins the ultimate battle. Jesus conquers death. This act sets out his plan to rescue us from a world shaped by the forces of evil. Through Jesus' actions on the cross, we can begin a new life with God, empowered to pursue His plan for a new world of peace and joy.

So dawn on Sunday brings us hope. Our true Messiah is here and he will lead us.

By **Bishop Stuart Robinson**