

To the people of the North Tasmaina parish, God's grace and peace be with you in the name of Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for us to win us for himself.

I thank God for you and have become quite fond of you. When I look at your congregations and towns, I am excited for the opportunities that seem to walk through our doors.

I thank God for you because you were willing to have me when I didn't have a call, even as a locum, knowing that it could be quite temporary and only six months. You even received me at this time as I spent that whole six months harping on about how my time here was temporary. You were willing to work with my family situation even though I was completely unsure whether I could deliver what needed to be delivered in this parish and also care for my family well. I'm still not sure I'm doing this, but I thank God that you have received me.

When the time came, you were also willing to call me your regular pastor even though you already knew some of my foibles and personality traits. You have been receptive to my preaching. You have been hungry for Bible studies, which have been well attended. You've engaged in hard topics. You've received some liturgical restorations and so I thank you for being willing to receive me, my personality, and the way I go about things. In doing so, I pray that you have received the gospel, that you have heard that Christ suffered and died for you and that your sins are forgiven. I also pray that as you have received him in word and sacrament, your faith and confidence in him have been built up.

That is the main purpose of this letter: to build up your faith, confidence and hope in Christ Jesus. I know that leading into GPC and General convention the feeling of the church can be one of trepidation. We do not know the outcome; we are concerned about the disunity in our church; we do not know how pastors and congregations will react or what they will see as the faithful path post-convention. Some may have placed their hope in a change of teaching and practice that will alleviate our problems. Others will be hoping for the status quo as they believe that this is faithful. Still more understand that our church body is divided to the point of breaking fellowship, and they await a new path devoid of divisive theological debates.

I don't know into what category you will fit, and to be honest, I'm not sure what the faithful path will be after the general convention. But I can assure you I will be seeking the faithful path, even if it means suffering, persecution, ostracisation and hardship. I want you also to seek the faithful path, not because I told you to but because you want to be found with Christ. He is the one who is faithful even when we are faithless (2 Timothy 2:13). He is the one who is not ashamed to call us brothers (Hebrews 2:11). He is the one who is willing to be found with the weak, the sinful, the outcast, and the tax collectors, for it is with us that he can do his work. The healthy need no physician (Mark 2:1&). Jesus came to heal the sick and seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). In a church that seems lost, we need Jesus all the more. Be confident that his promises are for you like these.

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. (Jerimiah 31:34)

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell **shall not prevail** against it. Matthew 16:18 (ESV)

He (Jesus Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And **he is the head of the body, the church**. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:15–20 (ESV)

This is my body... this is my blood given for you for the forgiveness of sin!

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. **And behold, I am with you always**, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19–20 (ESV)

Receive the mark of the Holy Cross as a sign that Christ the Crucified has redeemed you!
(Rite of Baptism)

These promises are your hope. The state of your church body is not your hope, although it would be good if we could confidently assert that our church body was faithful. Christ is your hope; rest in him, bask in his promises, and trust that they are for you. Christ is our beginning, our end, our head, and our all-in-all (Hebrews 12:2). He holds everything together.

Pray for his church to be faithful. Pray that we will be faithful. Seek the kingdom for yourself and those around you (Lord's Prayer 2nd Petition). Talk to one another. I beg you, talk about your differences, your concerns, and your hope in Jesus. Share this letter so that everyone has an opportunity to read it. Don't bicker and fight, but earnestly seek Christ and his unity that comes by agreement (Galatians 5:15). Engage with the synodical convention if you can; it will be live-streamed. <https://www.lca.org.au/synod-livestreams/> Subscribe to the news so that you know what has been discussed. Become involved in your church. Live out the fellowship we profess.

Cling to Christ Jesus and trust his word. Seek out his word and find his promises to you, he wants you to be confident in these promises. He wants you to put away your worry and anxiety because you know that he cares for you (Matthew 6:25-34). He has led us through all manner of difficulties in the past: financial problems and challenges, matters of sin, conflict, division, and pastoral vacancies. God has provided for you and led you through all these (Psalm 104, 105).

Remember that God is your fortress and strength (Psalm 46), and he promises that he will not leave you as orphans (John 14). Our Lord Jesus Christ is with us in word and sacrament; he has been with us and continues to be with us until he comes again (1 Corinthians 11:26). You are not alone; you have not been abandoned; your God is with you.

Be at peace and stand firm in the faith.

Pastor Sam Modra

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