

# St Luke's in the City

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

1 July 2007

## Celebrating at the Crossroads

Dear Friends,

*'Comprehensiveness' has been an Anglican watchword. Admittedly, for some observers outside the Anglican Communion there may appear to be an indecisiveness about Anglicans – I am fondly reminded of the Rabbinical saying, "Two Rabbis, three opinions!" Some outsiders are mystified by the fact that Anglicans do not seem to have a fixed opinion on anything, that there is no confessional statement such as is typical among those churches more heavily influenced by John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli, and to a lesser extent Martin Luther. The (inaccurate) caricature is that Anglicans take no stand on anything, and therefore stand for nothing. Anglican bishops are asked by the perplexed media, what do Anglicans believe about abortion, gene-splicing, homosexuality, contraception, and so on. Most often their answers are puzzlingly, and perhaps disappointingly, inconclusive. At least both the Pope and Brian Tamaki (I can't actually bring myself to use the title 'bishop'!) give direct and conclusive answers! (As an aside, it is a damning indictment on the church almost universally that these are the sorts of questions the media always wants to ask of bishops. Why, for instance, are church leaders not consulted on matters to do with property ownership, currency mechanisms, tax reform, public housing, labour laws, investment practices, and so on?) But others have delighted that Anglican theology is generously 'comprehensive', sufficient so as to hold in check the excesses of the fundamentalisms of both biblicism and traditionalism. For some, the 'Anglican settlement' has appeared to offer the ideal containment and détente between 'evangelicals', 'catholics', 'liberals', and 'conservatives'. We should not underestimate this very Anglican capacity, forged out of the convulsions in late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century England. Though we may laugh at the quaintness and apparent irrelevance of 'Vicar of Dibley' Anglicanism, the fact remains that in such a church there is room for all.*

*No doubt this is the very reason why we are finding the current times so painful. Anglican 'comprehensiveness' is certainly being tested to its limits. Recently, just before setting off on three months study leave, the beleaguered Archbishop of Canterbury gave an interview in which he expressed openly his fears for the future of the Anglican Communion, so seriously stretched to snapping point are the 'bonds of affection'. From the beginning there have been political groupings in our church, each conscripting words from the tradition which actually belong to all of the baptised – 'evangelical' and 'catholic' are words with which we are marked by our baptism. As you know, I object in the strongest possible terms to what I regard as the theft of generous and life-giving words which belong to the whole community in the services of narrow political agendas of this grouping or that. Anglican comprehensiveness, which is worth defending, expresses the recognition that it is ultimately dangerous to the human soul to be singularly catholic, protestant or liberal.*

With my love,

David