

## GOSPEL AND CHURCH MINISTRY

**Acts 3:12–20; Luke 24:36b–48**

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### **The Anniversary of a Ministry**

I am very glad that I am preaching this morning, not at the anniversary of the dedication of a building, but at the anniversary of the beginning of a ministry. It is 150 years since the first resident Anglican clergyman, the Rev'd Frank Philip Strickland, was appointed by Bishop Short in 1856 as a missionary to the newly created mission district of the Light and Gilbert valleys, based at Kapunda.

Note that he was not appointed as a parish priest. There was no established parish at Kapunda in 1856, and no Anglican church building. It was a mission district, and Strickland was sent here as a missionary. His job was 'to live at a centre where most people could be gathered and regular Sunday services held. Itinerating during the week, he was to make contact with the scattered groups of his district, gathering them for services and classes at places which were found to be most convenient'.<sup>2</sup> Bishop Short set out the qualifications of a good bush missionary—for that is what Strickland was to be: 'Considerable physical power, much energy in character, and a zeal not to be quenched by hardship and occasional rudeness or neglect, the ability of a ready preacher, the meekness of a ripe evangelist, and the refinement of an educated gentleman, all seem to be required and demanded of the ministry of our church'.<sup>3</sup> Such paragons were not easy to come by, and it is by no means certain that Strickland had all of those qualities, but the bishop had to take what he could get. You'll see from the photo in the porch that Frank Strickland was not a young man when he came here. He was an older theological student that the bishop had secured from England. The bishop ordained him as a deacon at Holy Trinity Church North Terrace Adelaide on 27th February 1856<sup>4</sup>—this would have been Strickland's first experience of the hot Adelaide summers—and sent him as Missionary Chaplain to the outskirts of the colony, the edges of British civilisation, this new mission district of the North. Frank Strickland served from here for two years. In 1858 he moved to Riverton as rector, when that became a separate parish. After another two years he left there at the end of 1860, and we hear no more of him after that. He was never ordained as a priest.

### **Kapunda in 1856**

When Strickland arrived in Kapunda, it was not like it is now. Copper had been discovered here fourteen years earlier, in 1842, and the mine was well and truly up and running. But there were none of the stone buildings that we see here today—they came later in the 1860s. Most people lived in tents or in two-roomed cottages built of wattle sticks, stone and mud, with thatched roofs or, if you were advanced, wooden shingle tiles on the roof. You had to buy your water off a cart, and store it in casks buried underground. Coach traffic was going

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<sup>2</sup> G H Jose, *The Church of England in South Australia II. 1856–1881*, Church Office North Adelaide, 1954, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Jose, pp. 2–3.

<sup>4</sup> L P G Smith, *Centennial of Christ Church Kapunda, Diocese of Adelaide, South Australia 1856–1958: A Short History*, 1957, reprinted in Peter Hopton, *A Short History of Christ Church Kapunda 1856–1976*, Christ Church Kapunda 1976, p. [2].

through to Burra, where copper was discovered in 1845—it was to produce five times as much copper as Kapunda. The Wallaroo-Moonta deposit, twenty times the size of Kapunda's, was still to be discovered in 1860. Farmer settlers were taking up holdings, and discovering that the size and methods of farming they knew in the old country had to be considerably changed if they were to make a living in this new climate and countryside, that seemed to them so grim and forbidding. Two camps of aboriginal people were located where Dutton Park and the railway station now are.<sup>5</sup> The English, with the Scots, had control of pastoral and mining interests—they were mostly Anglican and Methodist. The Cornish—staunch Methodists—and the Welsh—mostly Congregationalists—and the Irish—thoroughly Catholic, just settled down on Bakers Flat—were the labour force. The Germans—Lutheran stock—were starting to farm out at Bethel.<sup>6</sup> We are aware of 'ethnic churches' among present-day immigrants to Australia, such as the Greeks and the Russians, but that is how we all were in those days. When I was here in the 1970s, I came across people in Kapunda who still spoke of the Irish church and the English church and the Cornish church and the Welsh church—the English church for the mine managers and the upper crust, of course, but the other churches for the workers!

### **Background to Strickland's Appointment**

This was part of the background to Strickland's appointment here. The percentage of colonists who described their religion as 'Church of England' declined from 53% in 1846 to 40% in 1855. Bishop Short and his advisers were concerned about the drift of Anglicans to other denominations, and saw that the main reason for this was the failure of the Church of England to provide its adherents with clergy and churches. Left to themselves, they either lapsed into religious apathy or attended services conducted by Wesleyan Methodist, Primitive Methodist or Bible Christian local preachers. They 'have attached themselves' Bishop Short gloomily told his synod, 'to other bodies of Christians, whose lay preachers and missionary circuits have brought the Word within their reach'. Catholic, Wesleyan and Bible Christian causes were all well advanced by the time Strickland arrived in Kapunda, with church buildings of their own. 'If anything will destroy the Church of England in these Colonies,' the bishop said, 'it will be the want of a "Gospel and Church Ministry"'.<sup>7</sup> In the early 1850s there were quarterly visits by the rector of Gawler, and services held in Doctor Blood's home and in Mrs Orchard's Schoolhouse down behind where the Congregational Church (Chapel Theatre) now is. But once in three months is not often. Even Dr Blood, a few years later, impatient with the Anglican Church's 'high church practices', went and joined the Congregationalists, while still retaining his trusteeship of Christ Church.<sup>8</sup>

Not that those who claimed allegiance to the Church of England were necessarily loyal or deeply committed. One clergyman at the time lamented the 'long established habit of non-attendance or very rare attendance at public worship'.<sup>9</sup> That is why Bishop Short said that his missionaries needed 'a zeal not to be quenched by hardship and occasional rudeness or neglect' on the part of those they ministered with. In the history of the Anglican Church in South Australia I do not think that there have ever been any 'good old days', except perhaps in the 1950s and 60s—and there were things that were starting to happen then that we are paying for now, that shows there was still something rotten at the core.

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<sup>5</sup> Rob Charlton, *The History of Kapunda*, Austaprint, Hampstead Gardens SA, 1971, pp. 12–13. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Charlton, pp. 63–77.

<sup>7</sup> David Hilliard, *Godliness and Good Order: A History of the Anglican Church in South Australia*, Wakefield Press, Netley SA, 1986, pp. 27–29

<sup>8</sup> Smith, p. [5].

<sup>9</sup> The Rev. E H Burnett, of St Michael's Mitcham, in SPG, *Annual Report*, 1855, p. 135, quoted Hilliard, p. 25.

Another thing that the bishop had to contend with was financial support. ‘Nonconformist’ churches were used to raising their own support, but members of the established and endowed Church in England expected their church’s services to be laid on for them free of charge. That didn’t apply in the colonies where, especially in South Australia, there was strict separation of church and state, and no one church was to be favoured more than the others. So Anglicans in South Australia were very much on the back foot in that regard. Bishop Short worked hard to obtain regular grants of £500 a year from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, a missionary society in England.<sup>10</sup> That is what would have paid for Strickland’s ministry here: gifts of people in England for gospel ministry in the colonies.

### **Gospel and Church Ministry**

So imagine we are Frank Philip Strickland arriving in Kapunda in 1856: no church building, no parish organization, only people. How would you go about it? If for some reason we lost this building and didn’t have it, what would we do? Would there still be a church?

Well, what did Peter and John have when they walked into the temple, and saw the man lame from birth (Acts 3:1–20)? They didn’t have a Christian church building—they’d been meeting in each other’s homes, day by day, for praying and sharing and teaching and eating together. Strickland and his little Church of England group met in his own house on West Terrace, and in Mrs Orchard’s schoolroom, and later a large room in a row of cottages on Hill Street known as the ‘Immigration Depot’. Peter and John didn’t even have any money—‘no silver or gold’. But what they had, they gave. They knew the risen lord Jesus Christ with them, and in Jesus’ name the lame man was healed, so he could come ‘walking and leaping and praising God’. Peter made it clear that it was not ‘through our own power or piety’ that he was healed. That’s a relief for us—if it was up to how strong and religious we are, I don’t think anything much would happen. In fact, any trusting in our own power and piety is likely to do more harm than good. The best we have been able to do by our own power and piety is to reject the Holy and Righteous One, kill the Author of life, murder the Son of God. If that is the best we are capable of, thank God we are not left stuck with that. Thank God that He raised Jesus up and gave him all the glory. God gave His Messiah to suffer for us—not for any sins of his own, for he had none, but for ours. So that we can now do what Peter said: ‘Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord’ (Acts 3:19–20). Where did Peter get that from? The words of the risen Jesus himself, in Luke 24:46–48: ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things’.

What is repentance? We think of it as feeling sorry for our sins, and it includes that, but it is much more than that. As Peter said, it is turning to God. It is not just repenting of our sins, but it is ‘repentance toward God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Acts 20:21). We are no longer afraid to be in the presence of God—we eagerly run to him with love and joy. We have a whole new attitude and heart towards God as He is. We know His love for us, in that He ‘did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us’, and so will ‘with him also give us everything else’ (Rom. 8:32). And what is the forgiveness of sins? Just the wiping away of all the guilt of every wrong you have ever done, or are ever likely to do! So that you do not have to carry a scrap of the burden of that guilt with you ever again, and none of it comes with you when you are launched out into eternity. No wonder we love God, and are free and longing to serve Him day and night in His presence!

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<sup>10</sup> Hilliard, p. 27.

That is what Peter and John had. With that message, they had the people, and they had God. And that is the church! You can't have more than that—and you don't need anything else. That is what Frank Philip Strickland had when he arrived in Kapunda, and I trust he knew it. That is what we have today. When I left Kapunda in 1984 to go as a bush missionary to Coober Pedy, the best piece of advice I received was from my father-in-law Bin Clark, who has since gone to be with the Lord. He was not a clergyman; he was a metallurgist who worked for Kelvinators. And he was at the front door of St Cuthbert's Church Prospect every Sunday morning giving the old ladies a hard time and making them feel good about themselves. What he said to me was this: 'It's a basically straightforward assignment: go to Coober Pedy, and walk with God with the people'. There you have it: walking with God, with the people, in the gospel of Christ. That's the church! You can't have more than that—and you don't need anything else.

We do have a precious account of Strickland's ministry in this mission district, from Bishop Short's report to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel:

The neighbourhood was notoriously bad . . . Mr S. began by visiting every house and tent that he could hear of. Many had not heard a clergyman's voice since their arrival in the colony. In some instances Mr. S. spent hours in teaching the adult members of the family to write. On one occasion he sought out a fever-stricken family whom no one else but the doctor would go near. In a miserable hut lay a father, mother and six children—one of them dead. The husband was too ill to talk, but his wife, in an ecstasy of joy clasped her hands, and sitting up in bed, cried out, 'Look, look, my children . . . that is one of the clergymen I have told you about that live in dear Old England—who would have thought that one of them would have sought us out in this wilderness?' So valued and blessed were Mr S.'s ministrations that the settlers set to work to build three churches, and in 1858 two were consecrated—at K. and R. [Kapunda and Riverton—the third was at Hamilton<sup>11</sup>]. Confirmations were held in each, the congregations were overflowing, and the collections amounted to £65.<sup>12</sup>

In listening to that, we need to remember that it was a report sent to the missionary society in England that was responsible for financially supporting the ministry of Strickland and others in South Australia. I'm not saying that these things did not happen in the way written, but such reports tend to be a bit selective, and the way it is phrased would not have done the fundraising any harm.

A little later, in his report on the previous year to Synod in 1861, Bishop Short spoke of Strickland and his ministry in a rather less flattering way:

Two of the clergy have quitted the diocese . . . R. [Riverton] has been filled up, and the full administration of the Sacraments assured, which, either from the unwillingness of the late officiating Deacon, or his incompetence to undergo the usual examination necessary for admission to the Presbytery, was improperly and inconveniently interrupted. Considerations of health, and the hope of making better provision for their families, led to their departures.<sup>13</sup>

We can only read between the lines of the Bishop's displeasure to surmise that old Strickland, for all his 'valued and blessed ministrations', maybe found the job rather too much for him, especially on the low pay he was receiving.

### **How Lovely is Your Dwelling Place**

We long to know more. What made Frank Philip Strickland decide to become a theological student in his old age, and come to South Australia—of all places? Was it because he

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<sup>11</sup> Smith, pp. [2–4]

<sup>12</sup> Jose, pp. 3–4.

<sup>13</sup> Jose, p. 4.

couldn't get a job anywhere else? Or was there more to it than that—a call of God? What was his relationship with God? What impact did he have on the lives of people? What was he up against—in the general community, and from his own congregations? We know that his successor Thomas Sabine, did not have an easy time of it. Before he left, in 1866, three men refused to accept the position of people's warden before a fourth one was willing to take it on. Sabine wrote in his own handwriting: 'It is pitiful!!! Put not your trust in any child of man!' Why was Strickland never ordained as a priest? Wasn't he bright enough? Or were other things more important to him than that? Actually I think it is rather fitting that our pioneer clergyman never made it to being ordained as a priest—it means that any of us could do this, if God calls us to it. How did his wife and family fare in all of this? I take it from the bishop's remark that he had a wife and family. We don't hear anything about them. Why did Strickland leave, after only two lots of two years? Was the job too much for him? Did his health fail? Was his ministry a failure—as it seemed to be in the eyes of the bishop? What was God doing in all of that?

If Strickland's ministry wasn't all as rosy as the report to the missionary society made out, isn't it good that Strickland had a gospel of the forgiveness of sins and repentance to God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord? Isn't it good for us, who are no less pressed in these days, that we have that same gospel of the forgiveness of sins, repentance to God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ? For do we not need so desperately in our day those times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord? And are they not coming to us even now?

Speaking of the presence of the Lord, there is one other piece of tantalising information about Frank Philip Strickland that we have from the day that this building called 'Christ Church' (somewhat smaller than it is now) was opened for Divine Worship on Sunday October 11, 1857.<sup>14</sup> There was a morning service and an evening service, and Frank Strickland preached at both: 'two very impressive sermons . . . to large and attentive congregations'. We do not know what he said—wouldn't you love to?—but we do know the texts on which he preached. In the morning, from the first verse of the 84th Psalm. That reads: 'How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!' We find it easy to apply these words to a building like this, and so to miss their larger meaning. The one who wrote the psalm no doubt had in mind the physical temple in Jerusalem. Strickland may well have made that connection. But at evensong he preached on the 48th verse of the seventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and that says: 'Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands'. It sounds like it contradicts the text from the morning,—'How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!'—doesn't it? Especially if you try to apply that text just to a building. But perhaps, for old Frank Strickland, there was no contradiction. Why is it so great to be with God in His dwelling place—wherever that may be? Because of who God is! Psalm 84 goes on to say:

For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
he bestows favour and honour.  
No good thing does the LORD withhold  
from those who walk uprightly.  
O LORD of hosts,  
happy is everyone who trusts in you (Psa. 84:11–12)

Maybe old Frank Strickland knew the Lord in that way. He knew how to worship with a church building and without one. Whether with or without a church building, whether liked

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<sup>14</sup> Smith, p. [3].

or disliked by the bishop, whether he succeeded or failed or somewhere in between, maybe old Frank Strickland knew that, and that is what he was trying to tell the people on that day:

For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
he bestows favour and honour.  
No good thing does the LORD withhold  
from those who walk uprightly.  
O LORD of hosts,  
happy is everyone who trusts in you (Psa. 84:11–12)

If he was trying to tell the people that, then I hope they heard him. For walking with God in that way, with the people, in the gospel of Christ—that's the church! You can't have more than that—and you don't need anything else.