



OFFICE of the
VICE-CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY
OF DIVINITY

GRADUATE ADDRESS | Saturday 20 November 2021

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, University staff, guests, and fellow graduates. Good afternoon everyone,

It's so good to finally be able to gather together to celebrate today. I want to take this opportunity to thank all those who I shared my journey of study with: fellow students, all those at Whitley college, especially to then dean Gary Heard for steering me along the path, my Old Testament lecturer Professor Mark Brett who I gained an enormous amount from, and my New Testament lecturer and Minor Thesis supervisor whose guidance I'm so grateful for, Associate Professor Keith Dyer.

When I came to Whitley College in the middle of 2014, I had a hunch. At that point I'd gone through something of a conversion, if you like. A few years prior, my wife Colleen and I with our two young boys had moved to a new neighbourhood, only twenty minutes from our old one, but one which was a totally different world, culturally and socio-economically. Having joined the missional order, Urban Neighbours of Hope, we suddenly found ourselves sharing life and home with people for whom experiences of marginality were common - whether through mental health struggles, intellectual disabilities, seeking asylum, or in other ways. Our new setting had started to re-shape the way that I saw faith, the questions I had, and the lenses through which I read scripture. I'd begun to suspect that there might be something more to this story of faith than simply a way to get to heaven when we die.

Through my study at Whitley I had an opportunity to explore that hunch: to explore the ways that the biblical texts had themselves largely been composed and put together in settings on the margins; to dive into this story of liberation for slaves in Egypt, exiles in Babylon, and exploited peasants in Galilee; and to understand myself - the descendant of hard-up Cornish and English migrants who had come to a colonised land; who had dug up the soil looking for gold on Wathaurong and Dja Dja Wurrung Country; who had gained access to land and whatever else they needed to make a life as part of the dominant culture in this land now called Australia. I could better ask the question of where I might fit in the biblical story: Slave or Egyptian? Exile or Babylonian? Exploited peasant or exploiting ruler?

I am still a part of UNOH. For the last nine years I've lived in a rough and ready neighbourhood in Melbourne's north, alongside many who face their own daily struggles and carry their own past trauma. Part of my role in the neighbourhood is chaplain in the local primary school. If you had told me ten years ago that I would be spending much of my time with primary school students kicking balls on a sports field or digging holes in a garden I would have perhaps raised my eyebrows. But I know now where I fit in the story. Alongside those on the margins. Being present. Partnering with neighbours and local groups to together build a better world - a world where food is grown and shared amongst neighbours; a world where no one fears violence and children feel safe; a world where everyone has something meaningful to contribute to the whole; a world where everyone is proud of their culture and brings it as a gift to the community. In short, a world centred on this crazy idea that biblical faith calls shalom.

Thank you.

Bradley William Coath, Master of Theology (Coursework), Whitley College



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University of Divinity
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