



Newsletter

Diocese of the West

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Hello Brothers and Sisters in Christ

I pray this finds you all in good health and looking forward to the upcoming Synod on June 30th thru July 2nd. Christ Church of the Sierra in Reno will be graciously hosting this year's Synod. We are honored to have as our main speaker, Bishop William Ilgenfritz. His presentations will be "In the Sandals of the Apostles," and "Doing Mission as the Apostles did it." Hope you have all registered and made your hotel reservations.



Jesus and the Disciples

The Bishop's Corner

Half a century ago, if you asked who the enemy was, we all knew the answer - Communists. Today, probably most Americans would answer with some variation of Moslems or radical Islam. But for American Christians, Islam is not the real threat.

France has reacted to an influx of Islamic immigrants, which many French see as a threat to their culture and society. But what exactly is being threatened? One would think it would be the Christian heritage. Yet, only a tiny percentage of French are participants in any church. What is apparently being threatened is a humanistic secular way of life, with "democratic values." It would appear that America is going the same path. The objection to Islam therefore, has to do with its very obvious commitment to God in a specific way and the societal impact which that will have.

Getting rid of the Moslems in France, or here, is unlikely to fill the churches, nor restore lost moral values to society. And if they are converted, it will be mostly to the same shallow secular society, which sees itself as tolerant, but in fact, is highly prejudiced toward any

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manifestation of institutional religion, especially those which challenge the prevailing culture and whose God expects a transcending commitment.

This is not to promote Islam. But it is to say, that except for a violent fringe which absolutely should not be tolerated, they are not the enemy of American churches. Our churches are losing America without reference to Islam. It is the cancer from within what used to be called a "Christian nation," which is defeating churches. The symptoms are an increasingly empty Sunday morning; the statistics of decline reflected in every mainline denomination's annual reports; the exclusion of Christian concepts from the public square; the tragic refusal of our government to assist violently persecuted Christians (especially in the Middle East, where we bear some responsibility for having caused their problem), and in a host of other manifestations which we rarely seem to pay any attention to as churches.

One would expect a church to fight this secularization trend by every means possible, especially after witnessing the same trends a generation or two earlier in Western Europe and England, where except for immigrants, few are in church. Massive Christian formation of children and adults alike; intense emphasis on receiving weekly Eucharist, so you can carry Christ as you confront the society around you; strong community life within our parishes, and a powerful sense of the need to reach others around us with the love of Christ, would be the anticipated action.

There are some parishes like that, but not many.

In Western Europe the churches kept doing the same thing as always, even when almost everyone had left. We appear to be in the same mode. Most active Christians in America today seem confused by the loss of the society around them, but often are so entangled in that society they fail to discern its basically anti-Christian attitude. Indeed, due to pandemic poor Christian formation, they are often confused by Christianity as well. A clear statement of my own sin; the good news of the Gospel of God's love through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and the consequent response of commitment and joy, is what is needed.

But more often than not, churches have proclaimed a mumbled message of details, be it that "drinking-dancing-gambling-fun is evil," or "just live a good life, believe in something and everything will be fine," or "pray to God for everything you want and he will bless you with lots of stuff, heal all your ailments, and solve all your personal problems." Many churches even have the mindset of pitching Christianity as one more item on the shelf of our consumer paradise; no need to commit, no need to learn, just show up and we will make you feel better. Or the reverse has happened; people have been driven away by judgmental churches, refused grace because they were flawed, wore the wrong clothes, had the wrong skin, spoke the wrong language, had the wrong culture or orientation, didn't fit in the economic or social demographic, or had the wrong story to tell about themselves.

Yet secularization is not inevitable, to be endured with fatalism. It happens when Christians lose sight of what is important and

The Bishop's Corner (continued)

compelling, and when we only talk to each other about our Faith. Sadly, I observe in most churches, no one even worries about this. We form our friendships, we have our comfortable patterns, we sit in the same pew or chair, we kick in a few bucks. The transforming message of the Gospel for all people is someone else's problem.

We are gathering again for our Synod. It will emphasize mission. It will transform the life of everyone who attends, and vitalize every congregation to burst into the flames of Pentecost all around them.....or not. If the latter, our little marginalized Diocese will fade away, I hope, because why should it continue like the others, to simply accommodate an aging remnant until they are gone? Our existence is not simply a factor of ACNA politics. It is the question of whether there is any important reason for us to exist as a Diocese or as congregations.

SPEAKING OF SYNOD

Synod will be, as elsewhere and previously noted, June 30-July 2, with the host church being Christ Church of the Sierra in Reno, Nevada. If you need information on it that you are not finding, please contact me (bpwinmott@gmail.com). Note that each parish is entitled to two lay delegates and that all priests and deacons are delegates. Our meetings and worship are open, so anyone is welcome to attend.

Parish News

Spiritual Maturity and Covenant: A response to the Bishop's options for the Diocese of the West

By Father Ron Longero

Bishop Mott's article about what the possibilities are for the Diocese of the West after his retirement, I'm sure, bring about a certain amount of anxiety and curiosity about what may transpire and how the diocese might choose to go, etc. It certainly did for me at first. It also fed into something within that I'm not sure I would want to confess as a virtue. That is the desire to go shopping for the next right 'place' that meets *my* needs and the needs of *my* church. We all have experienced, or perhaps have done it ourselves, gone 'church shopping.' From my side, I know what it is like to hear those words from a visitor. Each comes thinking about their own needs, forgetting what the truest need of all is, God.

We as Anglicans in some ways are blessed, in that we have sought within our history to be a catholic Church that can have within her boundaries, a breadth of Christian conviction about the essence of the faith and how it should be lived. The Book of Common Prayer is a witness to that. That blessing if you will, also brings its own besetting sins. It leaves people all too often with the idea that "if I don't like it here, I can go there." Sort of like serial monogamy. Speaking of which....

Throughout the Old Testament there are numerous references to the covenant which

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God has with Israel and Israel with God. The covenant is often times analogous to the covenant of marriage between a husband and wife. The complaints are often made that Israel the espoused is an unfaithful spouse, acting like a harlot, always trying to find a better mate. This week on my study day I was reflecting upon something I was reading when it dawned on me, our relationship as a parish church with the Diocese of the West and consequently with the Reformed Episcopal Church is much like a covenant. (Maybe even exactly.)

Many of us expect our civil leaders to be principled and to therefore make policy and decisions based upon principles. We dislike and don't respect leadership that seeks to do what is expedient for itself. As I reflected further, I found myself needing to repent of many of the comments I made last Sunday regarding the options the bishop proposed for the diocese as it sought to determine its future.

As a parish church, when the AMIA imploded as a consequence of irresponsible behavior, we sought another jurisdiction. We found a new home with the Diocese of the West, REC under Bishop Mott. In essence, we made a covenant with them. Hopefully, most of you are aware by now through teaching and writing that I understand the essential nature of the Church to be grounded as "one, holy, catholic and apostolic." Secondly, I see the Anglican Way within that Church. For our part, we sought governance and a way forward in our own obedience through the Diocese of the West and REC.

Many people argue and debate who the true church is. I am of the opinion and I believe evidence throughout history would bear this out, that the true and pure catholic faith is not manifest in one particular jurisdiction or even the Church Militant. It is the Church Triumphant. Often we complain about the 'state of Anglicanism.' Rest assured that the other jurisdictions within the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic" Church think the same of themselves from time to time. As Anglicans we struggle individually and communally to become nearer the people that God intends. Our hope lies in Christ perfecting our nature. It is to Him we turn.

We become unfaithful to our covenants when we seek to hop from jurisdiction to jurisdiction trying to find "that right place." We must remember that the Church is both visible and invisible. It is carnal and mystical. It is human and divine. Jurisdiction doesn't ever fully define who an individual or even a parish church is. It does provide an authority to which we can learn obedience and faithfulness in covenant. Therefore, it seems to me that the only proper position to take is to remain faithful to the covenant we made within Diocese of the West and REC. Likewise, it seems to me that the diocese needs to remain true to REC. At one time in its history, REC was a good option for DOW. Why should that change?

That brings me back to a besetting sin within the Anglican Way. We love the fact that we have enough breadth to live in communion with people of vast theological and ecclesiological traditions (although not without tension). However, it does allow for us to have a unity

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which I believe is consistent with the prayer Jesus makes in the final discourse in John's Gospel. That strength is countered by an equal desire that when a group of us doesn't get all of what we want, we break off from the group and do our own thing under the facade of being the 'true faith.' Interesting how there are many true jurisdictions that can't commune with others. Not to berate, but simply to make the observation, because even with the best of intentions we Christians still live with souls that haven't reached the perfection of Christ. It is my belief that if the Anglican Way expressed as traditional, biblical, etc. is to flourish, there has to be more unifying. There needs to be the commitment we make to each other in covenant. Some may challenge me by saying, "Well if one party breaks covenant doesn't that void the relationship?" The only response I can think of is when we break covenant with God, does he void our relationship? No. We repent and are reconciled. "Yes, but when one part breaks covenant with another and doesn't repent, how can there be a relationship?" For the time being there can't and the Church is big enough that those things take time. However, most of us have watched the disintegration of TEC as one traditionalist group after another left. It came down to a situation where there wasn't enough critical mass left to fight the slide over the cliff.

We, of the new traditional movement in Anglicanism in North America, must recognize that the catalyst for the new unity was perpetuated by the moral collapse within TEC. We came together knowing that there were some differences theologically, ecclesiological and sacramentally.

Some choose to sit on the edge (REC is part of ACNA but still functions with an escape clause if certain issues don't get resolved appropriately) wanting a say without fully investing. I spent enough years as a cleric to understand that to have full voice and vote you have to sign your name to the covenant. I believe it is time to change our thinking and our behavior when it comes to dividing. We are weaker divided than united in both ministry and mission. How does Christ divided bear a witness to the essential unity of the Holy Trinity?

The long and short of it then is that I believe and am committed to our covenant within the DOW and REC. There is no perfect jurisdiction. In our parish we understand that we are to be committed to growing saints through ascetic discipline. We made a covenant. It seems to me that the principle of spiritual maturity would compel us to live within the decision we made three years ago. The spiritual maturity we should be hoping to find lies not in jumping from one perceived better visible jurisdiction to another, but rather within the fruit of disciplined asceticism that enables one to truly grow toward union with God, for He is the true fulfillment of all of our longing. Peace.

Thank you Father Longero for your insightful thoughts

How to Read Scripture

We found this very informative article written by the Reverend Greg Gobel, founder and Editor-in-Chief of anglicanpastor.com

In the Parable of the Talents, Jesus pictures God

How to Read the Scriptures

investing in us. The investments are gifts of his grace that empower us to bear fruit for his kingdom. One of those great gifts we enjoy is the wide accessibility of the Bible in English, with high literacy rates, and the ability of pastors to be educated in the languages and backgrounds of Scripture. Not all Christians in our world have this “5 talent” situation, but we do. How can we invest these talents to bear fruit?

Before we look at that question, we have to lift a few burdens. First, not all of us are expert Bible scholars, and that’s okay. As the Church Father and Bible Scholar Tertullian said, “Your faith has saved you, not your skill in the Scriptures.” Second, the Bible’s main purpose is actually not to be a collection of moral tales which help us cope with life, although it does provide that. Third, the Bible that we use has numbered chapters and verses so that we can find specific places. However, it is not intended to be broken down into minute, numbered lines which overwhelm us. Having lifted those burdens, we can be free to engage with the Bible in the way the Holy Spirit inspired it.

The story of the Road to Emmaus in Luke 24 is one place to start. Here Jesus goes through all of the Old Testament, Moses and the Prophets to show how they reveal *himself*. That’s right, the Old Testament’s purpose is to reveal Jesus Christ!

John 3:16 is really the key to all of Scripture: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

We will not always understand all of the details of Scripture, and there are many confusing places. But the main point is to prepare the world for the coming of Christ, to reveal that coming, and to call all men to salvation in him. The story of Joseph in the book of Genesis is a great place to show how the Bible works. Joseph can be read as a moral tale, of patience, trust, and humility. And it is useful to see it that way, but to only see it that way misses the main point. To get a handle on the big picture, let’s review Joseph’s story. He is loved by his father, but misunderstood and resented by his brothers. He is put in the ground, left for dead. He is falsely accused and put again in the ground in jail. Then by a miracle he is raised up to the King’s right hand. He uses his position of power not to destroy his brothers, but to save them. In fact, he saves his own Hebrew family, along with the Egyptians by storing up and distributing grain to everyone. He places his family in a safe place in Egypt, along with the Egyptians.

Sound familiar? Jesus is loved by the Father, but his own people and all people misunderstand him. He comes to the earth but is misunderstood, resented, and finally crucified and buried. By a miracle of God he is raised up and seated at God’s right hand. But instead of using his power to destroy us, he uses it to save us. Jew and Gentile, together living in reunion with God and each other. He provides for us from the storehouses of his grace.

The Holy Spirit inspired Scripture, so these historical stories are true, they are related to us through the People of God and the language

How to Read the Scriptures

and culture of their day. Not all the details directly relate in every way. And yet they are given to us to prophetically reveal God's love for us through the incarnate Son.

This is our family history, the good, the bad, and the ugly. Its all there, and Scripture doesn't hide away from the truth. But also there is God's intervention in our history, bringing about reconciliation from alienation. The individual stories of each human being (ours too!) intersect with the family history of the human race, and all flow back to Jesus Christ.

We bear fruit when we experience these stories in light of the big story, allowing the love of God to be told to us again and again. We are transformed when the Holy Spirit opens our ears to truly hear and believe that God does indeed love, forgive, and heal us. And when we listen to the stories of those around us, and tell the story of God's love, they are called from estrangement from God's family back to restoration and peace through Christ.

“Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.”

Prayer Requests

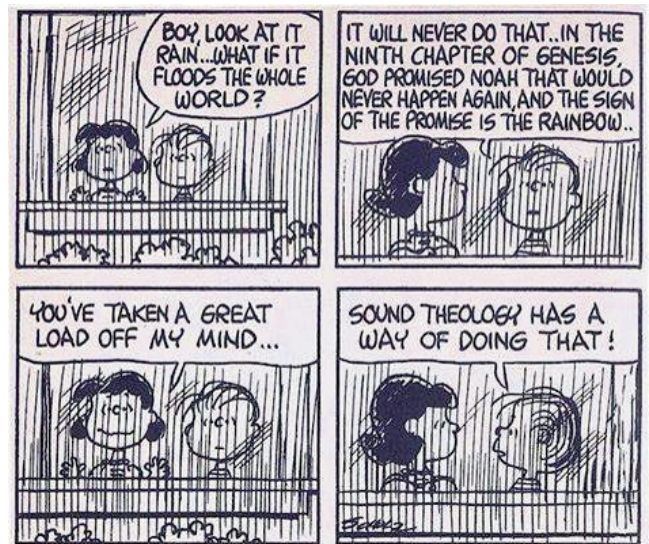
Pray for our Brothers and Sisters in Christ all over the world who are suffering for their faith.

Pray for Father and Mimi Longero and Christ Church of the Sierra as they host the Synod, and for safety for all those traveling to attend.

Hint of Humor

Money for the Pastor

A little boy was given a five dollar bill to put in the collection plate. When the offering came around, he wouldn't put it in. But after the end of the service, when he went to shake the pastor's hand, he pulled out the five dollar bill and gave it to the pastor. The pastor asked him, “Why are you giving me this money? Why didn't you put it in the offering plate?” And the boy answered, “Because my mommy told me you're the poorest pastor we've ever had.”



Happy Father's Day - June 21st

A father is neither an anchor to hold us back, nor a sail to take us there, but a guiding light whose love shows us the way.



God bless all you fathers and may you enjoy your day”