

The Line

Convocation of the West



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Vicar-General Rev. Michael Penfield: mapenfield@earthlink.net
 Editor: Susan Peterson: smprrp@sbcglobal.net

Knowing the Word of God

What will a knowledge of the Bible do for you? “That we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” The Word of God imparts patience, comfort, and hope.

You won’t find any hope in the daily newspaper. You won’t find any hope in modern literature. Look at any field and see if you can find any hope. There is none whatsoever. It is dark and dismal when you look out at this world today. My friend, the only place you can find real hope is in the Word of God.

~ J Vernon McGee

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Romans 15:4).



Advent

As we begin Advent, many of the psalms and Old Testament lessons portray a people in big trouble, surrounded by conquering enemies and evildoers. The first step of the Twelve Step program comes to mind, where the person confronts that he or she has an out of control problem which is beyond their ability to fix. The thought can be lost in the myriad of details, both theological and practical, which form our preparation for the Nativity feast. It is certainly lost on many, in and out of church, that the Church begins her New Year on November 30, with Advent, a season of penitence and contemplation, looking both inward and forward.

Details abound in all aspects of the Christmas story. Among others; who were the shepherds, how can the phenomenon of the heavenly choir they heard be explained, what was Caesar’s census about, was the manger in a stable or a cave, did Jesus have brothers or sisters, when and from where did the magi come and what were their beliefs, why is Christmas on December 25? Advent asks instead why Incarnation happened.



Advent (continued)

If you wish to understand that question, you must start in Genesis, not Luke. Creation and Incarnation are in fact inextricably linked in understanding the Christmas event. But you will also be inundated with details here as well. How many days in the creation process, were Adam and Eve “real” people or symbolic representations of mankind in general, where was the Garden located, whose fault was the Fall?

None of this will help you. But what happened is quite clear. God creates as an expression of his love. It was his goal to create a perfect environment for his creatures to share in love, much as earthly parents might want to create a wonderful environment for their children. But a love relationship between God and his people means mankind must be free to accept or reject that love. Forced love is not love at all. The rest of the story is about mankind’s rejection of God’s love, which leads to the big trouble humanity found and finds itself in, as mentioned above. We cannot fix it, as human history repeatedly illustrates. God’s consequent choice was whether to abandon or salvage creation. He chose, in his unchanging and perfect love to sacrificially save creation. That is why the Christ came to earth. The details don’t much matter. God’s plan to restore the perfect love relationship intended from the beginning matters.

This is where Advent begins. This is where you and I need to begin, with confronting the very unpleasant fact that we are in big trouble, that all the denial and sweet talk in the world cannot change the reality that each of us, and all of us together, are hopelessly mired in the consequences of our own sin. Despite a lot of brave talk and

silly notions of being righteous, we are lost. The Gospels are good news because they report that God has acted in grace to restore what we destroy. Otherwise, we are toast. Many people see religion as about being righteous, keeping the rules, dividing into who has been naughty and who has been nice. Wrong. It is about the desperate condition we are in, needing total grace.

Advent exists to review that latter fact, up close and personally in your life. Confronting your own failings and demons is difficult. No wonder folks prefer to decorate the tree and put on the Christmas program in the middle of Advent. But in so doing, we totally miss the point. No wonder as well then, that massive mission drift occurs, and many simply revert to a celebration of the winter solstice with good feelings thrown in all around. No wonder equally that depression peaks at Christmas time, since avoiding the purpose of Advent means many are still staring at the overwhelming problem of their failing self-salvation, which they cannot fix. The lights, tinsel and false jollity only bring home the contrast between intended perfect love and the reality of a broken humanity.

This would be a good Advent to change all that for yourself. You may not be able to avoid the outer environment of a world frantically seeking impossible fulfillment in the celebration of “Happy Holidays.” But your inner environment can take some time to deal with this. Return to Genesis, as Adam and Eve are 86’d out of Paradise to begin their life as homeless refugee exiles. The rest of history is the ambivalent story of humanity on the one hand resenting God,



Advent (continued)

wanting to be gods, causing manifold wreckage in the attempted rebellion, and on the other hand longing to go home to where the loving Father waits patiently for the Prodigal so the celebration can begin. Like the Prodigal, we tend to persevere in rebellion until it becomes untenable. Only then do we truly hear the good news of the Father's love, even though it has been there all along. Only then do we realize our efforts at making ourselves great lead to self-idolatry, hurtful to God, creation, neighbor and self. Only then do we grasp at grace.

When Adam and Eve realized their attempt to overthrow God, reject his love and become gods had not worked, they hid, as failed revolutionaries do, from the wrath of the authorities. We still do that. These days, it is easy to hide in the hustle and bustle of celebrating the holidays. But Adam and Eve found they could not hide from God. We ultimately find we still can't.

This could therefore be a good time for a different plan, to turn around on the road and begin the trip back to the Father. Note that the Prodigal didn't come to his senses by brilliant reasoning and theological genius. It happened when he confronted the reality of his situation "on the ground." So this Advent, take a look at yourself. Who have I become? Am I fulfilling my God-given vocation? Am I, created as a woman, expressing and rejoicing in my God-given femininity? Am I, created as a man, expressing and rejoicing in my God-given masculinity? Am I, a baptized child of God, basking in the love of the Father, sharing that love with all the brothers and sisters in my immense spiritual family? Am I cognizant that

the earth is the Lord's, not mine? Do I take good care of it, in the little corner given to my dominion? Do I live my Eucharist all the days of the week? These are general and basic. You will have specifics in your life as you look in the inner mirror of your soul. The details of the season, Christmas parties, shopping at the Mall or whatever, will always give you a way to avoid these questions. Yet if you want to start on the road home, you can make it the priority even if you squeeze in some parties and shopping.

The Prodigal began the trip home with trepidation and low expectations. When we are humbled by an honest look at the reality of our situation, that is normal. Keep in mind though, that you know what the Prodigal did not, that the Father is watching and will be overjoyed to see you on the road. Then there can be a glorious celebration in the infinite love of the Father and the shared joy of knowing I am his.

Bishop Win Mott



Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. (Psalms 25:4)

The Vicar's Venue

Today, I would like to continue writing on The Benedict Option by Rod Dreher. Mr. Dreher wrote, "If it is going to bring about a genuine renewal of Christian culture, the Benedict Option will have to be centered on the life of the church. Everything else follows."¹ To my way of thinking, this is one of the most powerful ideas contained in the book. However, this statement is deceptively simple.

To have a group of people whose personal lives center on the life of the Church, there must be more than just a pretty church. There must be a true dedication to the recovery of what has been lost over the centuries. This, in turn, means that a whole culture and way of life must be carefully and meticulously recreated and cultivated. And it definitely includes rediscovering the worship and asceticism of the past. Therefore, the first thing that must be recovered is our liturgy

For those of us who have tried to preserve the ancient traditions of the Anglican faith, this is a daunting task. For one thing, there is no one tradition within our faith. There are in fact, several competing traditions. One such tradition is Anglo-Catholic. We look to the scholars of the Oxford Movement, William Laud and the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. Then there is also the Protestant tradition. We look to the scholars of the Elizabethan compromise, Richard Hooker and the 1552 and 1662 Books of Common Prayer. Those who are charismatic or evangelical will add the theological works of

¹ The Benedict Option by Rod Dreher, Sentinel, Imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, New York, New York (2017) page 101.

John Wesley and George Whitefield to these Protestant Books of Common Prayer.

Additionally, there have been many people who have claimed that they have rediscovered a more authentic form of worship that dates back to the beginnings of the Church, prior to its adoption as the official religion of the Roman Empire. In the 1960s, many reforms were adopted on such claims. Yet later, those historical claims were questioned as inaccurate. One notable author whose evidence was later called into question is Dom Gregory Dix. Although his book, The Shape of Liturgy (1945), contained some very good and legitimate ideas, it also was criticized as historically inaccurate.

This makes Mr. Dreher's call for "going back" much more difficult for Anglicans. He, a member of an Eastern Orthodox Church, is calling for Roman Catholics to return to their early Middle Age roots that existed at the time of Saint Benedict. We Anglicans cannot do that. It would conflict with many of our theological beliefs. Rather, I would ask us to return to the words spoken by our Lord and to the Psalms for a true evaluation of our worship.

Jesus tells us, "*The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*" [John 4:23]. And in Psalm 96, verse 9, we have "*O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; let the whole earth stand in awe of him.*" The former is an opening sentence for Morning Prayer, and the latter is an opening sentence for Evening Prayer. Both speak to the very heart of worship.



The Vicar's Venue (continued)

As Anglicans we are to worship the Lord in spirit, in truth, and in the beauty of holiness, regardless of whether we think of ourselves as low, high, or broad churches. "In spirit," is the hardest concept to define, but the easiest to experience and feel. I have been to very traditional churches which are dead. They have no spirit. Then I have been to others full of the Holy Spirit. Again, I have been to some dreadful modern services, and others full of the spirit of the Lord. Contrary to popular belief, the spirit is not in the form of worship, but rather in the sincerity of the worshipper, and the love of God among both the parishioners and the priest.

Therefore, the worship of God, first and foremost, cannot be hypocritical. It must be sincere. This means that if a church is a low church, that fact should be embraced and honored by the rector. The same is true with a high or a broad church. As soon as the rector decides it must change, many of the churches I know have lost the spirit. Therefore, I would modify Mr. Dreher's proposal and say that each church should foster the tradition that is consistent with its worshippers. After all, it is the people who make that building a church, and not the other way around.

But there is a second part to Jesus' quotation. We must worship in truth. This part is in the purview of the rector and is essential when dealing with the traditions of individual churches. Traditions are wonderful to honor when they are based in truth. But sometimes, false teachings enter a church and become ensconced in its traditions. This is very dangerous and must be stopped. And only

the rector can do this.

Additionally, it is the rector who makes sure that the lessons, the sermons, and even the music is "truthful." It cannot contradict either the teachings of the Church or Scripture. But, if the church teaches the true Gospel of Christ, then the worshippers will be worshipping in truth.

Finally, each church needs to worship God in "the beauty of holiness." This little phrase, I believe, has been misunderstood by many. It is not just to worship the Lord in beauty, but in the beauty of holiness. Some people seem to think that if everything is beautiful, it meets this definition, but that is not true.

Now, let me digress for a moment. One of the biggest errors that has entered the Church in recent years is the phrase, "God doesn't care." It crept into our lexicon in the 1960s. The idea was that if someone sincerely comes to worship, it doesn't matter how he or she dresses. What this later came to mean was that we shouldn't spend money on beautiful appointments for the altar or church or priests and deacons because "God doesn't care about those things." Well, if you read the Old Testament, especially the sections on the construction of the Tabernacle, the Temple, and the vestments for the priests, you soon discover this is not quite true. God does care, and He seems to care deeply.

If someone is traveling, if someone is poor, or if someone has just come to the Lord, clearly God does not care what that person is wearing. What is important is that the person comes to the Lord with a genuine heart of love and





The Vicar's Venue (continued)

devotion. But, there comes a point where we are also to honor the Lord. There comes a time for us to trouble ourselves to dress appropriately for God and for His worship.

As for our church's appointments, this also must be reconsidered. For some time there has been a studied simplicity, which was justified also on the basis that "God doesn't care about those things." Yet there is simplicity, and then there is cheap, and many things that were purchased as appointments were purchased because they were inexpensive. Yet we discover in Scripture that in the Temple, all the vessels were made of pure gold. The finest materials were used to build the Temple and were used for the Tabernacle because it housed God. Even the priests' robes were made of the finest materials to honor God. These items were specifically mandated by God for His worship. It is time therefore, to rethink whether our purchases reflect our belief that God is with us at worship and with us in the real presence at communion. We are to honor the Lord as best we can, and that includes in our appointments at church and how we meet the Lord in our Sunday service.

But the beauty of holiness is more than just appointments. It is celebrating the Eucharist, Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer in holiness. It is not beauty in and of itself, but rather the beauty that comes from worshipping in holiness. Only holiness creates the beauty. But this begs the question, what is holiness?

"Holiness" belongs to God (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 15:4). It also belongs to all Christians because they are consecrated to God's service and are

conformed in all things to God's will (Romans 6:19; 6:22; Ephesians 1:4; Titus 1:8; 1Peter 1:15). So if we worship God in sincerity as Christians who are trying to conform ourselves to the will of God, we will be worshipping God in the beauty of holiness.

But there is one more thing that we must all do in order to renew our Christian culture. It is not going to be easy, but it will be very rewarding. We must conform our lives to the Church's calendar, not the other way around. Transferring feast days to Sundays in order to accommodate everyone's busy schedule, will not achieve a true renewal of Christian culture.

I therefore call on all churches in our Convocation to reinstitute the Church's calendar. Ascension Thursday should be on Thursday. Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services should be brought back to the churches, even if the time of the service has to be modified. And in all things, the Calendar, which helps us live and experience the life of Christ, should be not only observed, but also celebrated!

Rod Dreher's call for all of us to renew our Christian culture means that all of us need to center our lives in the life of the Church. This in turn, means that each rector is to make sure that we worship the Lord in spirit, in truth and in the beauty of holiness. It also means the reestablishment of the need to honor God with that which is truly meet for His use, and not just what is "good enough." But finally, and most importantly, it means reestablishing the Church calendar in each and every parish within our Convocation. And with God's





The Vicar's Venue (continued)

help, we will be able to do all these things.
Amen.

The Rev. Cannon Michael Penfield
Vicar-General of the ACW



An Angel Spoke to Mary

An angel said to Mary, "Fear not".
And she said, "Let it be done as you say."
And by the power of the Holy Spirit
She conceived a son that day.

The child within her womb
Was no ordinary babe.
He was the Son of God.
Born into this world to save.

Jesus came to save all sinners
And redeem them for the Lord.
And we celebrate each Christmas
To show Him He is loved and adored.

Author Unknown



B e -

hold the Lamb

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the
sin of the world! (John 1:29)

There is a Kodak moment with first-time pilgrims in Israel. On the journey north from Tel Aviv to Tiberius, fresh off a long international flight, bleary-eyed tourists press their noses against the bus window for a glimpse of the region where Jesus walked. Upon first gaze of the Sea of Galilee, someone inevitably says through teary eyes: "He was here!"

If you have been to the land, you likely remember that moment. It's priceless.

Introductory moments are powerful. John's Gospel opens by informing the reader that Jesus is God in flesh (John 1:1-18). He eloquently invites us to pause at this mystery: "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us" (1:14). Following this thesis, we listen to the words of John the Baptist who states that he came to testify concerning Jesus. Smelling of camel clothes and honey-dipped locust, the prophet says: "He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie" (1:27).

And then it happens. The Baptizer makes THE proclamation. "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29).

Reflect on this argument a bit.

- Jesus is God.
- Eternity stepped into time as a human.





Behold the Lamb

- He came to this world to function as a sacrificial Lamb.

The Jewish imagery of Jesus as a “Lamb” is unmistakable. In one descriptive picture, John describes the Lamb’s purpose and clears the confusion about the first lap of the Messiah: He is God, in human flesh, who came as a sacrifice for sin.

Go ahead. Marvel at the Incarnation—our fancy-dan Latin word that reminds us that God became flesh. But don’t you dare miss the purpose of this Incarnation.

Press your nose up against the bus of life as you pass by yet another Christmas season. The babe in a manger came to pay the price for sin. He was here. And He did what no one else could do.

Say it: “Behold the Lamb!”

Priceless.

— Mark M. Yarbrough



Parish News

Consecration of Trinity Anglican Church Bishop William Ilgenfritz

On this very special day I offer my congratulations to the clergy, wardens, vestry, and all the faithful of Trinity Anglican Church. Your prayers and sacrificial offerings have made it possible for you to acquire this building dedicated to the service of Christ and His Church. I bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters of our missionary Diocese of All Saints and assure you of our prayerful support for the good work you have begun in this portion of God’s vineyard.

I have chosen as my text for this brief homily the words written by Saint Paul the Apostle in his first letter to the Church at Corinth, Chapter 3, verses 10 through 13: *According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw - each man’s work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done.*

With that scripture in mind I share the following story:

He was, by all accounts, a successful man. This builder of fine homes in an upscale American suburb was known to all as a creative craftsman and shrewd businessman. But, he was getting older now, and before he set out for Florida for the winter, he approached his top job-foreman and told him that he was retiring. “I want you





Parish News (continued)

to build me a home, the finest home this company has ever built. Spare not expense, use the finest materials, hire only the most gifted tradesmen, and build me a masterpiece before I come home next spring”

The foreman was at first flattered that his boss would trust him with such a responsibility, but then it dawned on him. If his boss is retiring, that means he will be losing his job.

The next day, the foreman set out to build a home for his boss, but it would not be built to specification. He ordered inferior concrete blocks for the foundation, but charged his boss for premium blocks and pocketed the difference. He hired inexperienced carpenters, plumbers, electricians, roofers, and landscapers, but he charged his boss wages that would be paid to master craftsmen, and put the difference in his own bank account. He installed cheap appliances and lighting, insufficient insulation, inferior carpet, and drafty windows, and he skimmed a tidy sum off the top for himself. In the spring, when the home was finished, it looked spectacular. It was the signature home in the neighborhood, and the only thing that made the foreman happier than how the project looked was the bottom line in his personal bank account. He had made hundreds of thousands of dollars that winter by cheating his boss.

When the elderly business owner arrived home from Florida that spring, he toured this home fit for a king, and he was ecstatic. The foreman thanked his boss for the privilege of working for him all these years. And then the owner did an unthinkable thing: he said to the foreman

“You have been a trusted friend and a loyal partner in my business for all of these years; you deserve a home like this.” And he handed him the keys.

Many years ago when I served as Rector of Saint John’s Church in Brownwood, Texas our congregation had a tradition which dated back to her founding in the 19th century. Following the Sacred Liturgy on Easter morning, the congregation would gather outside for a group photo. And every year, I would show that picture to friends and neighbors. Their reaction was always the same. “My,” they would say, “you have a beautiful Church,” and my response was always the same. “Yes, these people are a beautiful Church.” I’m sure you get my point. The Church is a beautiful building, but the Church is more than just that. The Church is the people. The Church is you and me. The Church is a beautiful building where God’s beautiful people gather to worship Him in Spirit and Truth.

In this Sacred Space we come to praise the Name which is above every other Name, ask for God’s forgiveness, know His healing power, hear His holy Word, and are nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ. This is a temple of God’s presence and a house of prayer. This is a special place where God draws us to Himself, a place where we find comfort, wisdom, support and strength for our journey through this life in preparation for the life to come. Here we become one with Christ and with one another.

Here at Trinity we welcome the newly baptized, grow in grace through Confirmation, unite couples in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony,



Parish News (continued)

and commit the souls of the faithful departed into the loving hands of Our Father.

Trinity is a building of brick and mortar, wood and glass, but it is ultimately its people. Saint Paul writes, “You are the temple of God and the Spirit dwells in you.” And it is up to us to keep the Spirit and to spread the Spirit, and to help the Spirit dwell in others.

Having received the Blessed Sacrament at the Altar of the Lord, giving us food and strength for the journey, we go forth as the Church into the world rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

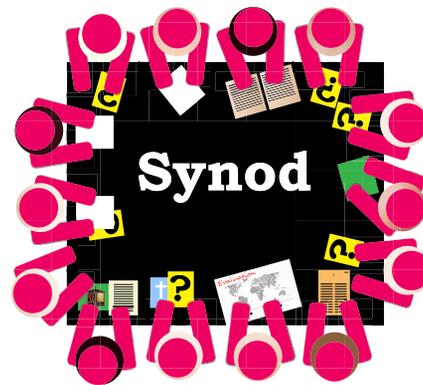
What is our ultimate responsibility as the Church when we leave this place? The answer to that question is both simple and profound. It comes to us in a sermon preached back in 1923 by the Bishop of Zanzibar, Bishop Frank Weston. He ended his sermon titled *Our Present Duty* with these words: *Now go out into the highways and hedges where even the Bishops will try to hinder you. Go out and look for Jesus in the ragged, in the naked, in the oppressed and sweated, in those who have lost hope, in those who are struggling to make good. Look for Jesus. And when you see him, gird yourselves with his towel and try to wash their feet.*

This morning we dedicate this building. The Church of God for the people of God. Take heed how you build upon her foundation, because on the Last Great Day, God may hand you the keys to His Kingdom and say that since you built it for me and for my people it is now all yours.

Parish News (continued)

Upcoming Events

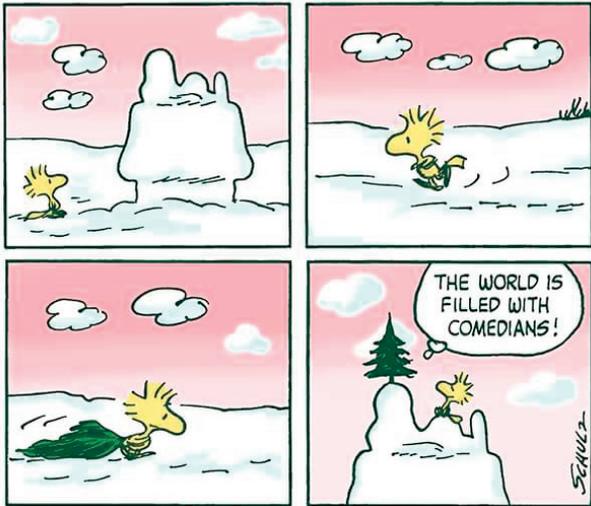
The **2018 MDAS Synod/Retreat** will be held March 15-17 (Thursday-Saturday) at the Dunes Manor in Ocean City, MD. The Convocational Meeting will also be held that week on the morning of March 15, which means you will need to arrive March 14 (Wednesday). The guest speaker for the Retreat will be the Rt. Rev. Alberto Morales, the Bishop of Quincy (ACNA). The Theme will be “Contending for the Faith Once Delivered.”



The next **Clericus** will be held April 3-5 (Tuesday-Thursday) at Holy Cross Retreat Center in Mesilla, NM. Guest speaker and topic TBA.



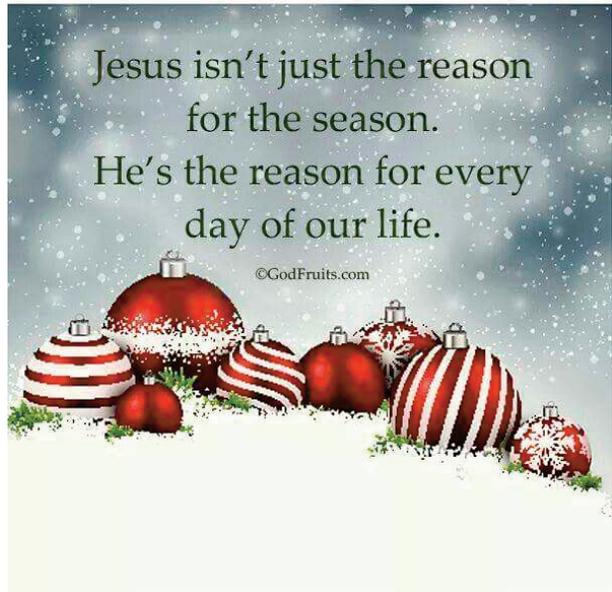
Hint of Humor



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Parting Words

With all the added responsibilities and activities of the season we can lose focus on the season's true meaning - Jesus our Saviour. Spend time in fellowship with Him, and receive the peace only He can provide. May you all have a very Blessed Christmas and a New Year filled with His love.



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