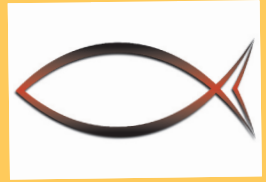




The Line

Convocation of the West



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Hello Brothers and Sisters

Our Country has experienced some very cold, and in some areas, snowy weather. Spring seems far away, and the month of February can feel like one of the longest. This may be the best time to check in on those who are not able to get out easily. Cabin fever is hard on everyone, especially the elderly and disabled. The next time you are on your way to the store, check on that elderly neighbor to see if they may need anything. This may not only make their day, but yours as well!



For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. Hebrews 6:10

The Vicar's Venue

Two articles ago, I wrote about fear and how it is affecting our society, and more importantly, our churches. This is a major problem today. But there is a second problem that is infecting our churches as well. It is anger.

Anger is endemic to our society these days. One cannot discuss things without one of three things happening: the other person will try to shut you down with his anger; the other person will change the conversation, quickly noting his or her desire not to cause a scene; or the other person's eyes will start to glaze over as they tune you out. For me personally, the last is the worst because it conveys the message, on purpose or inadvertently, that your thoughts or opinions are not worth considering. However, all of these are reactions that derive their origins from anger even though only the first one seems to be the most apparent.

Now before I berate our post-modern era, we must acknowledge that anger has infested the Church from a very early time. If you read Acts Chapter 15, you will see how the early church



The Vicar's Venue (continued)

had arguments about whether Gentiles need to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic Law. In other words, there were two camps: one saying that before a Gentile could be a Christian, he had to be a Jew, and the other saying that this was not necessary. The discussion was heated at times. But this was not the end. The Church continued and continues to have internal disputes.

During the early part of the undivided Church, heresies manifested themselves and major battles ensued. After the Great Schism, the Roman Catholic Church did battle with itself. Sometimes the church fathers were wrong and had to repent and change. Sometimes some faction was arguing for heresy and they had to repent and change. But in every era up until the Reformation, the Roman Church would listen to those who said that there was a corruption that needed to be remedied – the most famous of these being one led by Saint Francis. However, at the time of Martin Luther, anger ruled. The church leadership would not at first listen regarding indulgences, and the church split again.

Soon we had an Era of religious wars, and splits upon splits upon splits. French history is replete with these religious wars and violent acts of one Christian against another. In England, you have the split with Rome which had more to do with Henry VIII having a male heir and confiscating property and money from the abbeys, than a true difference in religion. But he also ushered in an era of religious anger and persecution. Thomas More, Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Cromwell, and Thomas Cardinal Wolsey all met untimely ends because of the religious fervor ushered in by Henry's decision to split with

Rome. (It was also not a good time to be named "Thomas" it seems.) And it did not stop with Henry VIII's death. Bloody Mary and Elizabeth I both persecuted those belonging to the opposite religion as they. Charles I lost his head, James II lost his throne, and the Puritans fled to America, all because of religious zeal.

But recently there has been a rather long period of quelled anger. The Victorian and Edwardian periods tempered anger by establishing certain standards of decorum that translated into a period of controlled discussion and disagreement. This continued into the 20th Century – but not perfectly. And the great atheistic regimes under Communism and Fascism had their own fanatical anger.

To say that anger in the Church did not exist during a certain era, is more romantic than fact. But I think it is safe to say that anger has ramped up lately. And we must come to grips with its sinful nature. Even righteous indignation can lead to the sin of anger. And this brings me to my personal pet peeve. We Anglicans seem so overly concerned with sexual sins that we forget the other sins, including anger. Whereas few may engage in a sexual sin, almost all give in to the sin of anger.

Jesus Himself addressed anger in His Sermon on the Mount. He warns us:

"You have heard that it was said to our ancestors, 'Do not murder,' and 'whoever murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you, everyone who is angry with his brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Whoever insults his brother or sister will be subject to the court. Whoever says, 'You fool!' will be subject to hellfire."



The Vicar's Venue (continued)

I do not know about you, but this passage has always put the fear of God in me. To liken anger to murder puts me in fear of judgment, just because being angry seems so natural to me. In other words, dealing with common everyday situations like driving, does NOT put me in a holy state of mind!

But I have also seen some rather angry confrontations at church. I remember one time in particular where anger took over one of my parishioners. It is the custom at the church where I was rector to name the president when praying for him during Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer or Holy Communion. During my time as Rector, we prayed for Mr. Clinton, or Mr. Bush, or Mr. Obama. And since becoming Vicar General, this same church now prays for Mr. Trump. But I had one parishioner who was so angry that we named Mr. Obama, that he left. But before he left, he told me in no uncertain terms and in the angriest way possible how much he hated it.

This confrontation took me back. I am of the opinion that if you are not fond of the current president, it makes even more sense to pray for them than not. After all, we believe that all is possible for God; including giving wisdom to someone whom we fear has none. But others did not see it that way. Their anger made it impossible for me to reason with them.

I have also seen quite a few hurt Episcopalians who come into our churches angry. I fully understand their anger; after all, they have come from an abusive "relationship." But they also can cause unnecessary problems and anger within their

new church family. Maybe the best thing we can do if we have many ex-Episcopalians in our church is have a retreat for them with a Christian counselor who specializes in abuse, so they can get past their hurt. It may be the wisest and kindest thing we can do.

But I am going to be emphatic about one thing: anger has no place in our churches. It is a sin, especially when directed towards our brothers and sisters. And it creates a stumbling block for those whom we are trying to evangelize. They see an angry church and they say, "Where is their Christian charity?" Or it proves in their mind, not that we are human, but that we are hypocrites. Of course, there will be disagreement. But anger is not the same and should be eschewed.

But anger can take another form besides the most common form. One who shuts down discussion shows signs of being angry. It may be that they do not want to get angry with you and the topic makes them angry. Or it may be that no discussion is permissible for them. And if they know you disagree with them, a sort of passive aggression may manifest itself. But this is also anger.

If we truly love our brothers and sisters, shouldn't we listen to what they have to say? After all, they may provide us with insights we do not have. And they may even be right. The only problem I have ever had with listening to others is that there are some who are quick to tell me their opinion, but do not want to hear mine, especially if it challenges a long-held favorite presupposition. But that aside, even the most opinionated person with which I have spoken has had some very



The Vicar's Venue (continued)

keen insights.

But that brings me to my last situation. It is the person whose eyes start glazing over when I begin to give my opinion. It is not so much that they are angry, though they may be, but that it starts getting me angry. I have taken up asking if the person really wants to hear my opinion or not, to avoid that look when their eyes go all foggy. Usually the answer is no, which is still not how we should treat our brothers or sisters, but it does save time.

We Anglicans sometimes are too obsessed with sexual sins and too casual about the less sensational sins, such as anger. But anger and hatred can kill a church. Fighting can reduce numbers. And an angry church may cause those who are seeking Christ to question if Christianity is really correct.

We need to learn how to talk, how to discuss, and how we can give constructive criticism. After all, we are a family. If we can have honest discussions without anger, we will grow spiritually. We will mature in our faith. And we will become a Light to an unbelieving world.
Amen.

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



Parish News

Upcoming Clericus 2019

The Anglican Convocation of the West will be holding their annual Clericus in Mesilla, New Mexico, **April 23 to April 25. Registration for the Clericus can be done on-line through our Convocation's web sight.** We would encourage all to register this way.

Our guest speaker will be the Right Reverend Kenneth Myers. The good Bishop will be speaking on spiritual formation and prayer.

Please have the proper registration forms to our Vicar General by **March 23, 2019.** Fees can be paid either in advance or at the time of registration.

Please make checks payable to "The Diocese of the West" as our "dba" has not yet been established.

This promises to be an excellent Clericus. We hope to see you all there!



Parish News (continued)

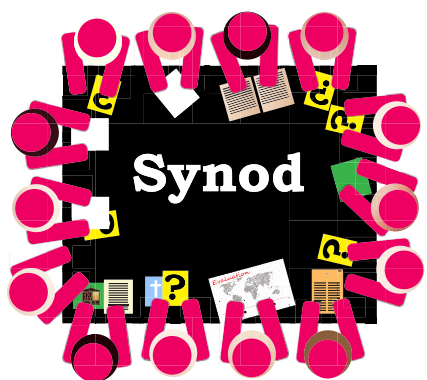
Upcoming Synod

The Missionary Diocese of All Saints will be holding their 2019 Synod in Ocean City, Maryland in March. Additionally, **the Anglican Convocation of the West will be holding their Meeting of the Convocation at the same time and the same location.**

The Synod is March 21 through March 23. Our meeting will be the morning of **March 21**. This means that those members of the Convocation who will be attending need to **arrive by the evening of March 20.**

However, some parishes have already indicated that they were NOT coming. For that reason, we will be conducting the Meeting of the Convocation by telephone conference. If your church is not coming, please notify **Vicar General Michael Penfield** of the name of the person who will be telephone stand-by to represent your church via our telephone conference.

We hope to see you all there!



No More Religion in Church

Reference 1 Corinthians 15:12-23

Religion, according to Karl Marx, is “the opiate of the people,” mesmerizing them with promises of future “pie in the sky bye and bye,” so the masses will accept their exploited miserable lot here and now. With the modern decline of religion and increase in drug use, the current observation is more that “opiates are the religion of the people.” Seeking fast, fast relief, modern man wants his pain of soul, mind and body dulled now, an instant gratification. He is quite unwilling to wait and endure to receive his pie in the sky.

Many church people since Marx first wrote his words have been either offended or challenged by them. Some recent theologians have attempted to respond by talking about the “death of God” or a “demythologized” religion for moderns. Such spin is cute, but it misses the point and rather distorts reality in the process. Early Christians would have had no trouble agreeing with Marx on this point. Unlike many modern Christians, who see themselves as belonging to one of the great religions, the early Christians saw the plethora of religious cults of their time as quite separate from them. Religion is needed when there is a wall of separation between the divine and mankind. It provides the mechanism to propitiate and successfully negotiate with the gods, so they will not be angry with you, but instead will help you. But in Christ there is no wall. The very beginning act of entering the Church, baptism, incorporates you into Christ, who is himself Divine. The lack of standard religious paraphernalia and behavior, made the pagans of Roman times accuse Christians of being atheists. They needed no temple, no sacrifices, no sacred places reserved for encounter

No More Religion in Church (continued)

with the gods. Jesus in his encounter with the Samaritan woman, (John 4:19-24) makes this clear when he tells her that worship will neither be on the Samaritan sacred mountain nor at the Jerusalem temple, but “in spirit and in truth,” and that this is not simply for the future, but already “now has come.” In saying this, he identifies himself to her as the Messiah, the Christ who is acting to make this happen. He is the temple (John 2:19) and we are its “living stones” (1 Peter 2:4-5). And all the earth is the Lord’s sacred creation (see Psalm 24), not just some special spots. Likewise, the one effective offering of himself made by Christ, replaces the needless and useless repetition of sacrifices (Hebrews 10:11-18) done by the religions of Roman times.

In the history of the American Republic, the main purpose of religion (sometimes identified specifically as Christian) is seen as inculcating morality, without which democracy and liberty cannot survive. “It is simply impossible for people to be moral without religion or God,” says Laura Schlessinger, for instance. When polled, the majority of Americans believe this assertion, in contrast to Canadians and Europeans, where the majorities strongly reject the concept. Professor Greg Frazer of The Master’s University notes, “A number of key American Founders were neither Christian nor deists but theistic rationalists....They believed that promoting morality was the central value and purpose of religion.” The alarming problem in this is “identifying moral or ‘religious’ people as Christians makes the Gospel [message] one of moral behavior and character, rather than the saving work of Christ.” Because this is exactly

what has happened, the resulting muddle has greatly confused many Americans who connect the message of Christianity with a list of moral standards and an ethical foundation for the “American way of life.”

It is at this point, that the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians call us back to Gospel truth (as referenced above). The epicenter of Christian Faith is an event in world history, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ; “if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith....But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.” That statement of Paul’s has nothing to do with religion or morality. It is a statement of fact and historical reality. You can choose not to believe it, just as you can choose to believe that Napoleon won the battle of Waterloo and thereafter ruled the world, or that the Holocaust never happened. But all three events depend, not on your belief, but on historical fact. On a certain spring day in the First Century, Jesus did rise from the dead, as witnessed during the following forty days by hundreds of people, just as there were many witnesses to Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo and to the Holocaust.

The early Christians were, of course, not atheists. But neither were they adherents of a new religion, or any religion. Once they accepted the truth of the Gospel, that they were saved by the grace of God through Christ and baptized into him, they had no need of religion to reach or to placate God. Christ had come directly to them. They gathered in community to celebrate his presence among them, to be living members of his Body together, as Paul discusses in the chapters of 1 Corinthians preceding the comments noted above.

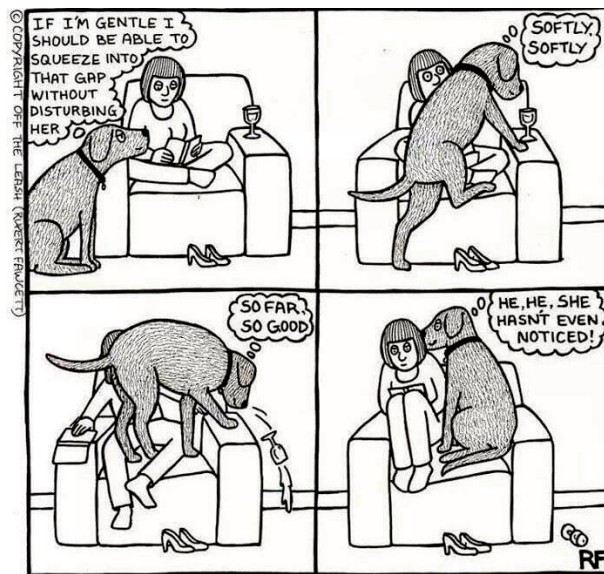
No More Religion in Church (continued)

Does this mean that they had no consequent morality, or that Jesus has nothing to say to them or us about how we live our life? Absolutely not. Last week's blog post discussed precisely that subject, the morality that Jesus urges on us. But it is indeed consequent to the central event of the resurrection. We follow Jesus and his teachings because his grace and love has saved us for a better way of life, not because it is a noble religious purpose to live a moral existence. To repeat Paul: if there is no resurrection, your faith is in vain, your morality is a branch without a vine, an arm unattached to a body, a lifeless form incapable of acting on behalf of the Body. And, as noted last week, the ethical imperatives as stated by Jesus, and as only relevant for those who would follow him, are quite different from what passes for Christian morality in our nation. The message we Christians therefore have for the world, including the American world, is solely to throw yourself on the mercy of God, as we do, and then rejoice as his love warms your soul. That message is simple and clear, and it refutes the false and scrambled rantings of those who purport to deliver a "Christian religious" imperative from a "moral majority." The confusion did not start with our generation, nor is it likely we can sort out the mess without major effort. But we really need to try, so that our generation and future ones can have a clear choice on accepting or rejecting the Gospel and our Lord based on its, and his, core message. Christ is risen!

Bishop Win Mott



Hint of Humor



Parting Words

