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THE LINE

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OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS



Fallow Field
Photo by David Howard

This Sabbath Year

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

As I am writing this article, it is a few days before Lent, and my thoughts are naturally turning to my preparation for this next season of the Church. However, the Pandemic, like a needy child, keeps rearing its head, demanding attention. I have some Roman Catholic friends who want to ask for a waiver this year from Lent since the entire year seemed to be one giant Lenten observation. But, I am thinking that this past year is something quite different than a yearlong fast.

Now, some of our churches are in areas of the country, which haven't been as restrictive as California has been regarding the pandemic. Others may have been in even more restrictive. But, regardless of where you live, we can all agree that this year has been different and difficult. We are not able to do what we were permitted to do before, and many of our other activities and distractions have been severely curtailed. And that has left me to think: why has God given us this time?

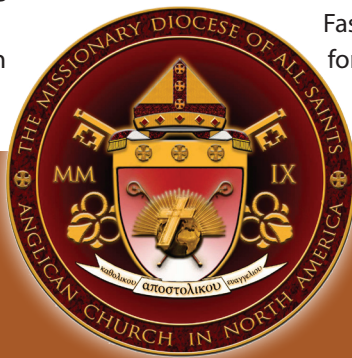
Many religious people have looked upon the Pandemic as just retribution from a disgusted God or a warning from God to change our ways. And can anyone doubt how mankind has turned his back on God? One person expressed to me his thought that this looks like a

replay of the Tower of Babel, where the hubris of man is being challenged and confounded by a virus. However, my thoughts have led me to think of this time, especially for us in the ministry, as our Sabbath.

In the Mosaic Law, God commanded the Israelites to observe the Sabbath. Every seventh day, they were to rest. But they were also commanded to have a Sabbath year every seventh year, where the soil was permitted to "rest" or go fallow for the entire year. The Israelites did not observe this second type of Sabbath, and so when God punished the southern Kingdom with their diaspora into Babylon, they were removed for 70 years – the number of Sabbath years they did not observe.

I think that we should look upon this past year of lockdowns and quarantines as our Sabbath year. This is a year of "rest" where we were not permitted to do all that we may have wanted to do. And we should see the time that we have left as our period of preparation. We need to prepare for what lies ahead. And this season of Lent may be our perfect time of preparation.

Fasting and prayer; studying and preparation is called for in Lent. As ministers of the Word, I am sure we all pray for the leading of the Holy Spirit. But,



Our Core Value is:

"The Convocation of the West is Missionary, bringing people to Christ and meaningfully engaging in the transformation of the culture around us."

The Vision of the Convocation is:

*"To STRENGTHEN existing churches;
To PLANT new churches; and
To RAISE UP missional leaders."*

sometimes we are so busy doing our “Lenten observations” that we forget the most important thing we must do, and that is to listen. What does the Lord want us to do? How are we to serve? How are we to reach these people so caught up in the world and so full of their own hubris that they look to men and not God for their answers? And how do we help with their disappointment when these avenues fail once again?

When the world starts reopening, we may find a people so jaded that breaking through these new barriers may seem impossible. But nothing is impossible with God. And, not to burst bubbles but, with the mutation of the virus, the world may never fully reopen – not for a long time. Then what? How do we serve the Lord? How do we serve if our church buildings disappear? How do we serve if we are not “permitted” to worship together? I am not saying this will happen – goodness knows I was not given the gift of prophesy – but anyone with an imagination can conceive of the worst dystopia given the present trends.

And how do we become more Christ-like? How do we welcome the sinner? Bishop Mott is fond of saying that being a minister is like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. I think that all of us have our “pet sin”, the one we can forgive readily, probably because that is the one we engage in the most. But can we forgive the sins that revolt us? Can we, like Jesus, dine with sinners? Can we welcome the sinner into our churches? Into our homes? Into our lives? Especially if the sin is not the one we “like” to forgive?

Then there is the question for which I have no good answer: how do we welcome the sinner? Does it help to drive the un-repenting sinner out of the church? After all, a church without

sinners is an empty church. Does keeping the un-repenting sinner in the church imply that we condone that sin? Or are we to wait for the Gospel and the Holy Spirit to cause a change of heart? Will it cause others to sin? And lastly, how do we know that they are not repenting their sins already? I have struggled with this issue throughout my time as a deacon, as a priest and as a rector.

But this is our time to consider these issues. This is the time to prepare. Come the celebration of Jesus’ Resurrection, will we be prepared to resurrect our churches? That must be our goal. We must be like the Israelite slaves in Egypt. We have to be ready at a moment’s notice, girded and with unleavened bread. We must be ready to act.

We are commissioned to bring as many as we can to God through His Son, Jesus Christ. We are to baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We are to teach them through the Word. We are to nourish them through the Sacraments. And we are to strengthen them through our community, our worship, and our prayers.

I want everyone in the Convocation of the West ready and able to do this as our Sabbath year comes to a close. I want us all to be enflamed with the Holy Spirit to serve our communities of faith. And I want us all to spread the Gospel of Hope and Love to our very troubled and bankrupted world. And with trust in our Lord and His leadership, it will happen.

God bless and God’s speed,
The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield
Vicar General for the Convocation of the West

A Travel Guide To Myself

By Bishop Winfield Mott

F. Scott Fitzgerald has a short story of a North Dakota Russian-German isolated farm kid, living in poverty far from the mainstream of American life, let alone any luxury or privileges. But in his imagination, the kid conjures up himself as “Blatchford Sarnemington,” a superior, sophisticated urbanite. He is not alone in dreaming of being someone else, often someone with great advantages. Nor does the dreaming stop with the end of childhood.

The view that I could be a much different person takes many forms. Some, as Blatchford, imagine great powers, good looks and fame. Others want to be another gender, sexual orientation, color, ethnicity, skill set or occupation (astronaut, president, brain surgeon, movie star, etc). Others simply want improvements: hair color, body shape, more articulate speech, sharper or faster wit. It can be quite specific: a wish to be a particular star, musician, politician or, more locally, a certain acquaintance.

It is possible to implement some of these dreams, for those dedicated to it. With modern products and surgery, you can indeed change hair color, body shape and even gender. Re-invention also can be done. Movie stars and other famous persons have sometimes changed identities, shedding their names to acquire a new, suitably Anglo-Saxon moniker, and developing a new mythology around themselves. But the majority of folks leave it to day-dreaming and wishes to be someone else.

The opposite can also be true. “I thank you I am not like other men,” the Pharisee tells God, a self-satisfaction which extends to condemning others and congratulating God for his good work in creating such an outstanding person, one who gives double the required money to religion and is an exemplary leader of mankind, even if only a self-imagined one.

Could there be a crisis of self among us? Is there a road besides either great discontent with whom I am or

complaisant but unjustified self-satisfaction? Some years ago, California actually established a commission to investigate the prevalence of low self-worth among its citizens. And in America in general, low self-worth is widespread. "White privilege" as a characterization of an entire race has a hollow resonance for many, because they perceive themselves as having anything but a history of privilege in their life. Identifying as "white" in itself is really a loss of heritage contributing to the lack of self-worth, no longer inheriting a pride and security in a specific heritage, be it Irish, Italian, Spanish, German, Iranian, Norwegian or whatever. Mobility also contributes to a loss of a home base identity and increasingly, people have no significant religious identity. Little is left but wealth to distinguish us from each other, an artificial class system based simply on finances. Nor is this simply an affliction of "whites," rather a shared one with those who likewise see themselves as without privilege and dream that they would have it if only their pigment were different. Lack of self-worth can cause other serious damage as well. It can make people give up their dreams and goals without even trying, feeling that it is hopeless. It can lead to an aggressive overcompensation to try to cover the feeling of inferiority. It can lead to poor choices in spouses, careers, and friends and cause envy expressed in tearing down others.

The Lenten season, which we have now entered, is often seen as a time of conscious sacrifice and intensified piety. But a more basic definition would be as a journey or pilgrimage, a road through crucifixion to terminate in resurrection. It follows the journey of Jesus as he gradually travels to Jerusalem to fulfill his historic destiny of Cross and Crown. Equally, it is an internal voyage of discovery into self, the reality of who I am and where I am going in my life. Such a trip, if honest, will not be pretty or resemble the Pharisee's bragging. "There is none righteous, no not one," says the Psalmist. It may even reinforce our feelings of low esteem, as we poke in what can seem like the dung heap of our personal history.

Nevertheless, to take the Lenten journey in a false or superficial way leads nowhere. At some level, we are aware of whom we really are. It is ironic that people in church especially try to hide whom they really are, since God has the most mercilessly accurate picture of whom we are. We may convince others and even ourselves of a fantasy self, but God knows better. The end of the Lenten road is a dead end, if based on our own resources. There is, as the Prayer book notes, no health in us.

So, we yearn for more and better. Jeff Bezos seeks fulfillment in endless wealth, Vladimir Putin in limitless power, Donald

Trump in thronging adulation, Jeffrey Epstein in sexual appetites. As the old song says, we are "looking for love in all the wrong places." Yet there never seems to be enough in these warped searches. The yearning in us is inspired, but it is the yearning to return to the Garden for which we were intended. Only by a return to our intended destiny can we find our true desire and true self.

Quinquagesima Sunday, one of the three magnificent Sundays preceding Lent (which modern liturgical authorities have robbed from you, distorting the Lenten journey), stands right at the gate of Lent. Its epistle is 1 Corinthians 13, about the absolute and essential need for love as the basic component of our Faith, with its consequent collect prayer, "O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth..." If you want to set your rudder for the Lenten course, don't begin with Ash Wednesday, with its

focus on fasting and repentance. That will follow naturally enough. Begin with 1 Corinthians 13, the love without which all our doings "are nothing worth." That will lead you to yearn for the Garden, where there are no obstacles to the perfect love of God, and no barriers to your full completion as your true self. Only there, as Augustine comments, will our restless souls find peace.

In our baptism, and ever after in this life, we die to the "old Adam," the Adam who rejects love and then yearns for what he had,

seeking it in the wrong places over and over. In resurrection, God continues to offer us a new life, rescued from the drowning flood of sin by pure love and grace. The purpose of repentance is entirely to make room for that undeserved grace. Our Lenten sacrifices, big or small, are nothing worth unless they lead to that.

The Lenten journey is not about denial, sadness and gloom, nor about extra doses of piety. Quite the opposite. It is the increasingly joyful journey towards that which you ultimately yearn for, that which can be truly yourself in fulfillment. Your worth begins because God has created you, in boundless love, and he does not make junk.

Knowing that fact can embolden you to make the journey into yourself, even though it may well include detours and false turns. God is faithful when man has failed. Your journey can reach a fulfilled life with the authentic you, because that is how God accepts you, as you are. As your interior Lenten pilgrimage increasingly jettisons the old Adam along the way, God's grace fills the void. The trip finds its end in Easter Resurrection, the new life you have yearned for, the Garden restored, the unity of love absorbed in the perfect love of God.



Why the Three-Year Lectionary?

By The Rev. Kyle Clark

This year the Bishop has set forth a theme for our diocese: “Father, Make Us One in 2021.” He is drawing upon John 17 and Jesus’ high priestly prayer. There Jesus prays: “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which you gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” [John 17:20-23]

The Unity of the Church is not something that is nice for us to have, something that we can enjoy, but isn’t very important. Jesus is here saying that the Unity of the Church is essential.

There is a lot in the pursuit of unity that we cannot completely control. We can, however, address the unity in our little corner of Anglicanism. Our Diocese, the Missionary Diocese of All Saints, maintains some essential doctrinal unity, but our liturgical unity is lacking. Some churches, like St. John’s in Boerne, Texas, use the 1928 Prayer Book. Some use the new ACNA 2019 Prayer Book, and some even still use the 1979 Prayer Book, each of these come with their own Sunday Lectionary.

The Bishop believes that the freedom to use our desired Prayer Book is core to the identity of MDAS, but he would like us to work towards some unity with using a single Lectionary throughout the Diocese. For those who may not know, a Lectionary lets us know which Scriptures we read on a given day, in this case, which Scriptures we read for our Sunday services. The Lectionary that the Bishop would like us to use is the ACNA’s Three-Year Lectionary.

This would help facilitate unity by every church reading the same Scriptures each Sunday. If you go and visit another MDAS church, you would not be surprised by what they are reading, nor would you miss the Scriptures that would have been read at your home parish. When we have the Bishop come and visit us, he will require we use this lectionary on the day of his visit, but the key point here is that we would all be reading the same Scripture. We would be letting the same Scripture shape and mold

us across the Diocese, and as we hear and obey the same Scriptures, we will be drawn closer together. This unity also extends to the large portions of the rest of the ACNA who have also moved to the three-year lectionary.

In addition to the unity benefit, a three-year lectionary has other benefits as well. It helps us to read a greater breadth of Scripture, more of the whole counsel of God’s Word. Over the three years, we will read more of each of the four gospels. We will also read through many of the New Testament Epistles. The three-year lectionary also offers us Old Testament and Psalm lessons that the one-year lectionary does not have. There are several sources we can draw from, but that adds to the lack of unity. It also

provides your priest with new Scripture passages, so his sermons don’t get as stale as quickly.

Now, I also know the benefits of the one-year lectionary. I am a fan of the historic one-year lectionary, but I also believe the benefits of the three-year lectionary will strengthen both our parish and our Diocese. Some may also be concerned that the ACNA three-year lectionary is the same as the three-year lectionary in the Episcopal Church, the Revised Common Lectionary. Though there are some similarities, the ACNA’s lectionary does not avoid the difficult passages of Scripture. Two examples that I know of: the ACNA lectionary includes both Romans 1:16-32 (Lent 3 Year A; the passage which speaks clearly against homosexual activity) and 1 Timothy 2:8-

15 (Proper 20 Year C; the passage which speaks clearly on women’s ordination). The “difficult” verses in these passages were excised from the Revised Common Lectionary, but the ACNA includes them. In the ACNA lectionary, we are called to heed the breadth and the depth of God’s Word, including the passages we may not find comfortable.

And ultimately, it is our duty to follow our Bishop. God has given us his leadership during this time. We are a Church that believes in the importance of our apostolic succession, our connection to the Apostles through the ministry of the Bishops as they have sought to follow the Word of God. In our case, this ministry has been passed down to Bishop Lipka, who is seeking to unite our Diocese around the Word of God. Even apart from our duty to the Bishop, it is a worthy goal to seek.

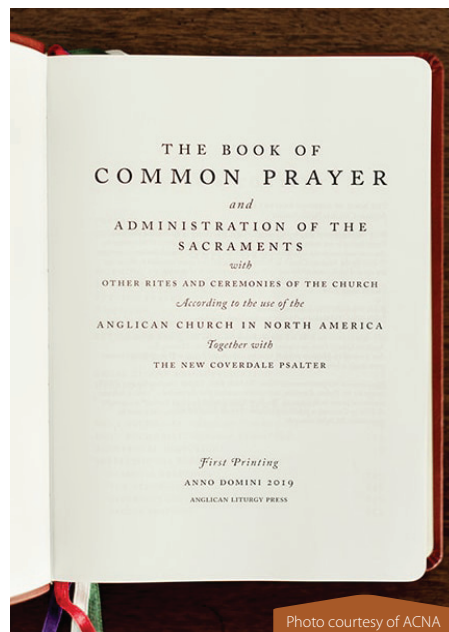


Photo courtesy of ACNA



Photo courtesy of The Holy Cross Retreat Center

Upcoming Synod & Clericus 2021

This year the Anglican Convocation of the West will be holding its annual Clericus in conjunction with its Regional Synod in Mesilla, New Mexico, **April 13, 14, 15 and 16**. This will be the first time we will be holding this joint meeting, but the reason may not be so clear.

Starting this year, the Missionary Diocese of All Saints will be splitting the Synod into three Regional Synods as well as having a General Synod on line. The General Synod will be streamlined to approve the most pressing business that the whole Diocese must approve, but the Regional Synod will cover the matters that pertain to the specific Convocation.

Our Regional Synod will be graced with the presence of Bishop Lipka. The business for the Convocation will be conducted as well as any confirmations and/or receptions, which need to be celebrated. Please let Vicar General Canon Penfield know of any such confirmations and/or receptions that will be celebrated at this time.

We will also be celebrating Holy Eucharist and the blessing of the Holy Oils. Finally, at this Eucharist, the clergy will be renewing their ordination vows.

After the Synod, our retreat will continue with our Clericus. All are invited to stay on for this part.

Finally, because of the Pandemic, the business portion of the Synod will be a hybrid model. Those who cannot attend in person, can do so via Zoom.

Please let our Vicar General know if you are going to attend either the Synod or the Clericus or both and whether it will be in person or via Zoom. Please remember that your two Representatives to the Regional Synod should be the same as for the General Synod.

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



SAVE THE DATE

May 22, 2021

Upcoming Virtual General Synod



The Missionary Diocese of All Saints will be holding their 2021 Virtual General Synod via Zoom, on **Saturday, May 22 at 10 am PDT, 11 am MDT, 12 noon CDT, 1 pm EDT**. This is an important Synod. We will be electing new representatives to several national councils and conducting the second vote on the Amendments to the Constitution and Canons of MDAS that were passed at our last virtual Synod. Therefore, we need to see as many of you as we can!

All clergy, including non-parochial and retired clergy, and the representatives of all parishes are to attend. Please make sure that you have elected your two representatives before that date and please send their names along with their phone numbers and their email addresses as soon as possible to your Vicar General at mapenfield@mailbox.org or 408-969-4915.

If you or your representatives subsequently discover that you will not be able to attend, please notify your Vicar General as soon as you find this out.

We hope to see you all on our Zoom conference!