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Photo by Alberto Bigoni

Being a Good Shepherd

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

I must admit, there are times when I wonder how I could have missed something. Is it carelessness? Is it preoccupation? Or is it because I am the product of the modern era? It is not one of my proudest moments to admit this, but for a long time, I have been scratching my head and wondering how the developed world has reached our present state of affairs when it comes to the Faith.

Our time strikes me as absolutely unique. After all, missionaries go to China or Africa or South America and have huge success converting the unbelievers. But that is not what we confront in the developed nations. We have “all heard” of Christ. Many in our society think they know who He is, and they have rejected Him as their Savior. How do we, as Disciples of Christ, reach a society who has already rejected God in general and Christ in specific?

Well, as a modern man, I am guilty of thinking that all that happens in my life is unique – it has never happened before. Or if it has happened, it somehow was different. Then it finally hit me; what an

idiot I have been. It is not unique at all. It has happened “a thousand times” before. And it is all recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible.

Read Judges. After each judge, there was a period of apostasy. It may occur only in one tribe, or in a group of tribes, but Israel seems to have bounced from believing in Yahweh to worshipping idols in rather short order. As the personal experience of Adonai’s deliverance waned in the Israelite society, so did devotion to the One True God. Soon idolatry grew.

Then read the predictions of the Prophets to their respective societies, which have rejected God. And read this passage from the Prophet Jeremiah:

“Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who shepherds my people, ‘You have scattered my sheep, and driven them away. You have not cared for them, but I will take care to punish your evil deeds. I myself will gather the remnant of my flock from all the lands to which I have driven them and bring them back to their meadow; there they shall increase and multiply. I will appoint

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.”*

shepherds for them who will shepherd them so that they need no longer fear and tremble; and none shall be missing,' says the Lord." [Jeremiah 23:1-4]

I submit to you that today is no different than periods of time in the Old Testament when people turned from God. And in this passage from the Prophet Jeremiah, you have God warning Judah that the crop of "shepherds" that existed at that time in what remained of Israel had been misleading His people. This is where we must begin.

Clearly God is using the metaphor of shepherds shepherding His people to mean those who are appointed as their religious leaders, namely priests and prophets. And, although this passage is a clear reference to Jesus, His ministry and His Church reaching all, including the gentiles, it also contains a message to our present day "shepherds." How has our society been misled?

One Roman Catholic Bishop I respect highly pointed to the clergy scandals of the past sixty years. Clearly, what these men did to children scarred those children for life. These victims' testimonies serve as "evidence" of religion's hypocrisy for those who do not like religion. And although there may not have been many who did these hellacious acts, those who want to besmirch religion in general and Christianity in specific will point these acts out repeatedly. And let's face it, the number of times these acts were committed do not matter – what happened was inexcusable on so many levels. And these actions do mislead.

Another example of shepherds misleading that exists today deals with those who gravitate to legalism. And here is where I must confess that I tend to go. I am a creature of habit. Rules and regulations for me are comforting. They help me and guide me. But that also means I tend to be rigid; I tend to be judgmental. And this also means I tend to the pharisaical.

Yet Christianity is about the Spirit of the Law and not the letter. As Saint Paul tells us time and time again, the Law only condemns. Jesus saves and He saves through mercy, grace and, above all, love:

"And we have such trust through Christ towards God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the LETTER but of the SPIRIT, for the LETTER kills, but the SPIRIT gives life." [2 Corinthians 3:4-6 (emphasis added)]

Today, as I write this piece, it is the Feast Day of Saint Mary Magdalene, and, in the daily lessons for this morning, the lessons include the Gospel of Saint Luke (Luke 7:36-50) and the story of the sinful woman who comes in to Jesus as He dines with a Pharisee. The woman washes Jesus' feet with her tears, dries His feet with her hair, anoints His feet with oil and constantly kisses His feet. The juxtaposition is clear between the Law, i.e. the Pharisee, who only sees a sinner, and the Spirit, i.e. the mercy of Jesus.

But there is something else. Think of the woman. Why is she there? Did she ask that her sins be forgiven? There is no indication of that. Then why? This is not an act of penance. This is not an act of barter – I will do this if You forgive my sins. No. It is an act of pure and simple love; it is an act of *agape* love. This sinful

woman loves Jesus. She loves what He is, what He does and for what He stands. This is an act of absolute devotion and absolute love. In the end it results in the forgiveness of her sins, but that is only secondary. And this struck me to the core.

We have heard it a thousand times: God is Love. But what is not clear and what we are not conveying to our people is that there is only one avenue TO God. And that avenue is Love. Love is the only way we come to believe in Christ. And Love is the only language that we have to communicate with God. If we are not truly in love with God, if we are not truly in love with Jesus, then we will never know Him and never be saved.

But falling in love, as we all know, comes to each of us in different ways. Some of us are thunderstruck; others grow in love slowly over time. Likewise, some of us dramatically fall in love with Jesus, commonly called being "born again." Others grow in love through an intellectual pursuit and/or worship of God and Jesus, like C.S. Lewis. But the goal is the same. We are to achieve a deep, abiding love. And through this love our prayers are lifted up to God like incense.

Every time as pastors when we stress the Law and forget the Love, we are misleading our flocks. Every time we "condemn" someone for breaking a commandment or a church rule and forget mercy, grace and love, we mislead. If we truly love our flocks like we love God, we must show that love. We may have to "correct" what is wrong or damaging to the community of believers, but it must be done with the understanding that the ultimate goal is to show the love of God, and NOT to show how wrong someone has been or how righteous we are.

But this brings me to the last way our shepherds are misleading their flocks, and that is by being too intellectual and too clever. A simple faith is what God wants. He wants us to simply love Him. And if we truly do, then we will change because we want to please Him. But many ministers are, shall I dare say, embarrassed and ashamed of the lack of intellectualism in our faith.

Some make it too complex, such as the concepts of "transubstantiation" and "consubstantiation". In the early church, the people were satisfied knowing that the Bread and Wine became Christ's Body and Blood and were honored to experience that mystery without explanation. During the Middle Ages and because of Scholasticism, that simple faith in the mystery was not good enough. It "needed" to be explained. And then explained again during the Reformation. Sometimes no explanation is needed. Jesus IS in the Bread and IS in the Wine. They ARE His Body and Blood. That is all that is needed. Sometimes mysteries should remain mysteries.

The other way the present day shepherds have become too intellectual is when they think "no modern person" can believe certain things. These shepherds write certain beliefs off as hysteria or superstition. Thus, I met an octogenarian couple at a wedding at which I officiated about twenty years ago. They both attended the big, wealthy Presbyterian Church nearby. The wife told me that they did not believe all that foolishness contained in the Nicene Creed. They only recited it because of its historical value. As the wife was telling me this quite proudly, I got the distinct feeling I was not hearing her voice, but rather her minister's.

Then there are those who believe that all religions are of equal value and equal worth. This is the third intellectual way our shepherds are misleading the flock and probably the closest to what happened in Judah during the time of Jeremiah. We have all heard of the Episcopal priest in Washington State who was given a deadline to choose between being a Muslim and a Christian, or the man elected to be the Episcopal Bishop of upper Michigan who was a practicing Buddhist. Although we hope that those who have never had an opportunity to hear the Gospel and believe may be provided another avenue for redemption by God, the truth is that, if we are truly Christian, then we must believe that what Jesus told us is true, namely:

“Jesus said to [Thomas], ‘I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” [John 14:6]

So, as bishops, priests, deacons, and lay people, all ministers of the Gospel of Christ, how are we to shepherd? How are we to lead people to Christ? Well, look to the Old Testament. What does Jeremiah tell us in this same passage?

“You have scattered my sheep, and driven them away. You have not cared for them.” [Jeremiah 23:2b]

First and foremost, we must care. We must care for our flocks, and we must care for each other. Our society is committed to reducing everyone to autonomous individuals who can play God, changing their reality at will. It is committed to atomizing society to the point where there is no community. We, as Christians, are to fight this. Our flocks need to become communities. We need to care for each other and have a socializing component to our churches. We are to be a nurturing, loving community that is committed to each other and willing to take care of each other. We MUST become one.

But also, in order to show the world what it means to be a Christian, we must care for those outside our community. We must care for the stranger; we must care for the non-Christians; and we must care even for our enemies.

The second thing we must NOT do is scatter. Saint Benedict in his Rule writes about one thing he found the most destructive to his community, and that was “murmuring.” He writes about the need to avoid murmurs. Talking about someone or complaining about something by murmuring can ruin a community – or, in other words, scatter the sheep.

Rumors, innuendos and snide comments must be avoided to preserve our communities and our churches. If someone has an issue with something or someone else, that person must have

the courage to talk with the offending person directly or be quiet. Talking behind others’ backs is “murmuring”. It shows a lack of respect and, in turn, a lack of love. However, if we are not courageous enough and loving enough NOT to murmur, then we will serve as vehicles of destruction in our churches instead of vehicles of unity.

There are many times also that I will here fellow Christians be smirching another Christian Church or group of believers. This is often unnecessary. With most other Christians, I find that we mostly believe the same thing. There may be some legitimate bases for differences, but these can be discussed respectfully. And what religion doesn’t have an idiosyncrasy that cannot be exploited for a joke, but that too can be done in good taste. But, basically if the other faith is orthodox in what they believe, then there is no need for criticism.

But the final thing that is crucial in our discussion is that often the shepherd who scatters is the one who makes his ministry about himself. He makes himself the center of attention. His interpretation, his message is all that matters. But that is not what Christianity entails. In fact, being a good shepherd is not making the faith about you. Rather, it is making the faith about Christ:

“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” [2 Corinthians 4:5-6]

So, as we look at our society and the state of the Church and shake our heads and wonder what to do, the first thing we must do is – trust the Lord. We must come to realize is that it is not about us. It is about God, about His plan for salvation, and about being a vehicle for Christ in the world. It is learning the language of love and communicating it to the world. And finally, it is about caring for each other. This will gather the sheep together and not scattering them. If we learn to trust the Lord, if we leave it in His hands, and if we live our lives as “bondservants” for Christ, then we can pray that the Lord will use us to reach this developed world that seems so resistant to the Truth.

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



Photo by Joshua Eckstein



TIME OUT / LIFE IN

By Bishop Winfiled Mott

Among the myriad of pandemic themes over the past year and more, the media has paid a lot of attention to the psychological and emotional difficulties. But for myself, it has been a time utilized in reflection and inner life, both personally and together with family (much of the latter thanks to that gift of God, Zoom). I say this, indeed confess this, almost with a feeling of guilt as others suffer depression, anxiety, loneliness and frustration.

Don't get me wrong. The passing of the pandemic, when it finally goes, is cause for great celebration and relief. Millions of Americans, and many more around the world, have suffered miserably infected with the virus. The grief of lost loved ones and the long term health effects lingering in many is awful. As well, many, infected or not, have had to deal with serious economic consequences; a lost job, hard hit business, lost opportunity, or, on the other hand, the intensity of a healthcare or other essential job putting great pressure on them.

But for most, the pandemic has been an inconvenience, a bother; the discomfort of a mask, events cancelled, restaurants closed, friends and family unvisited, projects delayed, travel not possible, kids stuck at home, plans disrupted. None of that is ideal, but compared, say, to the life of a Syrian refugee, a family in Gaza, or the average day of a rural Nigerian, it isn't all that serious.

When the normal patterns of life stop, it thrusts us into facing some realities. With normal patterns, it is often possible to avoid looking too hard at many things in my life, but with life sort of suspended, it brings us into focus. Perhaps it is dysfunctional family patterns, relationships which are not really work-

ing, maybe the fact that I can't stand myself either, all the unhappiness that normal routines can cover up, but now become exposed. Have you noticed that many of us need continual background noise, a radio or TV or something, to keep us from opportunity to think in silence instead of avoiding thinking or zoning out?

Thus, we come to the plus side of this massive pause in normal life. I see the return of "normality" with some reluctance, even though I welcome the end of inconvenience and threat of miserable infection. In a sense, we have all become sort of involuntary monastics, called out from the world to contemplate and face the basic questions God asks us. The absence of usual entertainments, excursions, restaurants and pubs, travel, even office routines makes us, against our will, into monks for the moment.

Or, at least it could. This kind of fairly lengthy disruption of normal life is a great opportunity to review if your life is really going where you want it to, and if your daily priorities are in fact the important ones. Part of the disruption is a change in consumer patterns, which may help to define what stuff you really want and need and what is best left unacquired.

As "normal" returns, I hope it won't be "business as usual. This is a (God given?) chance to regroup and to live differently than you were before. Beginning anew, where do you start?

1. A big plus of the current experience is the time spent at home, often with some vacant time slots where there once was a commute, social life, entertainment, and the like. It is the ideal time to initiate an organized daily prayer life, something you couldn't perhaps find time for before. This is not a new

idea, nor is it the exclusive activity of monks. A great achievement of the Reformation was the return of daily devotional life to everyone, not just clergy and monastics. In Germany, Luther returned the Mass to the people for their enthusiastic participation, especially weekly Eucharistic reception (medieval laity generally communed only a few times a year, and “saying Mass” was the property of the priest, while the people watched) and everybody singing the Liturgy.

Daily prayer was also returned to the people. In the Anglican Reformation, the village church bells called to morning and evening prayer, generally accessible with a short neighborhood walk. In Lutheran lands, it was often a household matter, where the head of the household led the prayers and readings (usually, with an extended family and hired hands, a much larger household than we have currently). It created a great and healthy piety, integrated into the routine of daily life. In modern life, it has all but disappeared. Urbanization and the decline of the village, together with the rise of the nuclear family, combined with an attitude that worship was to be (as in medieval times) the property of the professionals, the clergy, has helped to devastate the richness of Reformation worship life.

But now we have had a sobering break in modern life, “time for amendment of life.” Coming out of pandemic hibernation with the inclusion of the daily prayer office, you will be much better prepared for what is likely to be an exceptionally difficult time in ways very different from the pandemic. In practical terms, all Anglican Books of Common Prayer have morning and evening prayer, together with a daily lectionary for the Scripture and psalm to read. If you are doing this solo or need some liturgical guidance, you may want to consider joining an online worship, such as thetrinitymission.org. Father Jarrett both guides you through, doing the liturgical homework for you, and also lets you be part of a community, albeit electronic. As with any new exercise, don’t start with the complete plan, but work into it. Try to do at least the lessons and prayers of either morning prayer or evening prayer at least four or five days a week. You can then build from there.

2. The “American Way of Life” could be, and over time has been, many things. Today, however, its’ prime feature is centered in a consumer lifestyle. Another change which the pandemic “time out” offers is the opportunity to rethink the purpose of your life. In the pandemic, we cannot have many of the things we are accustomed to having. That can be a wake-up call that a simpler, less acquisitive life has advantages rather than being a hardship. As you re-enter normal life, you can come back in with a lifestyle of stewardship, both of your own resources and of the earth’s, rather than a consuming goal of acquiring as much stuff as possible.

Since the American economy is significantly dependent on selling more and more things, there is a lot of marketing pressure to consume and spend more. However, this is not a sus-

tainable plan for the long term, nor a Christian way to approach the world. As stewards, our goal is to manage our life and needs according to God’s will, not be driven by next quarter’s corporate profits. It means both a more sensible use of our goods and more awareness of the human needs around us and around the world. The earth has not been given to us as a great playtoy to wreck and throw away, but as a precious home to be nurtured and cared for, so it can in turn care for us.

Many are hoping that the pandemic has changed people for the better. We shall see. But it is within your power that you yourself change for the better. We are called to offer prayer



Bishop Mott with Fr. Jarrett and Family
Photo courtesy of Trinity On The Border
www.thebordermission.org

without ceasing, according to St. Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:17), which can be achieved only by offering our entire existence and all our activity as our liturgy (liturgy means literally the “work of the people”). Daily prayer in worship is one aspect of this. Offering our stewardship of our life and goods is the continuous activity constituting the rest.

Whatever your experience of the pandemic, God walked with you during it. When you re-enter, hopefully you will do so with the amendment of life afforded you by this episode. God will still be beside you.

Upcoming Liturgical Music Conference 2021



SAVE THE DATE: OCTOBER 19, 20, 21, 2021

St. Barnabas Anglican Church • Shoreline, WA 98133

Last year, we planned to have a conference on Music. A little thing called the Pandemic delayed it by a year. But now, it is going forward. The Conference will be in the Seattle area. Our host church is Saint Barnabas and our guest presenters will be Mr. Mark Williams and his wife, Tina Zenker Williams.

Mark Williams serves as the chair of the ACNA Music Task Force and oversees the music resources website for the province (acnamusic.org). Mark is also the editor for the newly proposed hymnal for the ACNA. He has served as the organist/choirmaster at Christ Church Anglican (1733) in Savannah, GA for the past 24 years. Over his 40-year career as a pastoral church musician he has served in churches in Seattle, Houston, Orlando, and Savannah. Mark is also a clinician and composer contributing several new hymns as well as service music to the proposed ACNA hymnal.



Mark's lovely wife, Tina Zenker Williams, has her masters in vocal performance having studied at Peabody Conservatory. She has run a large voice studio out of the church for the past 20+ years and serves as Christ Church's cantor. Tina grew up in the cathedral choral tradition at St. Luke's Cathedral in Orlando and is a wonderful educator.



Please remember, this conference is NOT just for clergy but for ALL those in your church that are involved in the music for the church.

If any one cannot attend because of financial reasons, the Convocation may be able to help. Please contact your Vicar General, the Very Rev. Canon Michael A. Penfield, at VicarGeneral@AnglicanCOW.org or at (408) 960-4915 so we may discuss what financial help we can offer.

The application for the conference and the registration will be on our webpage as well as in this newsletter and sent directly to all the clergy in the Convocation.

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