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THE LINE

Newsletter of the Convocation Of The West
OF THE MISSIONARY DIOCESE OF ALL SAINTS



By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

*“The LORD is full of compassion and mercy, * long-suffering, and of great goodness...*

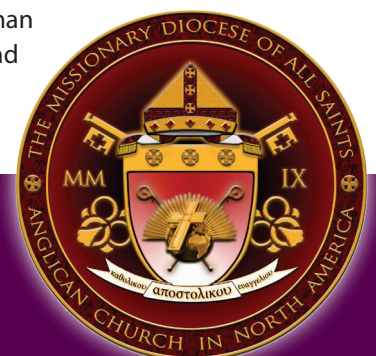
*He hath not dealt with us after our sins; * nor rewarded us according to our wickednesses.” [Psalm 103:8 and 10]*

“Mercy” is a concept that modern man seems unable to comprehend fully. He seeks justice, but does not want to acknowledge that mercy is very important. At least, if he does acknowledge mercy, it is only for his pet group or pet grievance, and even then, it is not truly “mercy”. It is an attempt to right a past injustice. But in our search for justice, we have lost the compassion for mercy – even among Christians. And, given our society, it is not surprising.

Remember the daycare cases years ago and the hysteria around it? A daycare, I believe in Los Angeles, was accused of molesting children, conducting satanic rituals, and torturing the children. Soon, other daycares were accused of the same. It turned out to be false. The memories that the children had of

these events were actually planted by the psychologists and counselors. The rest was pure hysteria. But, after this, the lives of these people who ran the schools were destroyed. Similar things were happening with fathers throughout the United States from psychologists claiming repressed memories, but were in fact planted by the psychologists themselves. Now we know better, but still lives were destroyed in the process. No mercy was found because the accusations allegedly came from the children and were so heinous “they had to be true”. In these cases, the merciful thing would have been to reserve judgment until a verdict was finally made. And, once the facts were fully understood, to let these people live and work in peace.

But, mercy can be misplaced or done inappropriately, as well. The Roman Catholic scandal revolving around children being molested by priests was such a situation. In



The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.

the past, before pedophilia was understood, mercy was shown to the priest in the attempt to have him desist. The offending priest was moved to a new parish so he could start over. But the result was disastrous. And as we began to understand pedophilia better, the church should have changed. But it did not, even though it was obvious that its solution was not working.

I recently saw a French movie about the pedophilia scandal in Lyon. It was based on real events. In the real case, the Bishop was actually sentenced to prison for his part. In the movie, there was a particularly powerful scene based on the facts. The parish priest accused of molesting all these boys, before the investigators, broke down in tears as he faced the Bishop. He said something like "I begged you for help. I wanted to stop! I begged you." It turns out the Bishop knew what was going on, but never gave the priest help, never removed him from the church, and tried to sweep the whole thing under the rug. So, the question is, if you were the Bishop, what would mercy look like in this case? To be merciful to the boys and families would mean removing the priest so that he was no longer in contact with any children. To the priest, it would mean to get him help. Justice would demand further help for those already molested, but mercy would involve trying to "rehabilitate" the offender while protecting children in the future.

In the Gospel of Saint Luke, we have a very good picture of mercy in the parable of the fig tree:

"A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, 'Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?' And he answering said unto him, 'Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.'" [Luke 13:6-9]

Pope Francis gets into a lot of trouble with his more conservative flock often when he attempts to be merciful. The last time, he was once again on his flight with reporters when he announced that he thought laws that criminalized homosexual behavior was unjust and that, as Christians, we should work towards getting rid of these laws, which exist in a lot of third world and Muslim countries. After he got off the flight, he knew he needed to clarify that sexual relations should only take place in marriage, not outside of it. But then he went on to say that there were rare situations that God condoned gay relationships. Thus he started a new firestorm. But in all these cases, I am convinced that he was trying to show the mercy of God. But did he capture the mercy correctly?

Mercy is different from grace – an unearned gift. Although it can be just forgiveness, in many cases mercy is more than forgiveness. Mercy demands of us more than just letting go. It means working with and helping the one with which we are to be merciful, just like the dresser of the vines. Forgiving is one thing, but often we also need to help them, nurture them, and be there for them so that they will eventually produce good fruit like what was going to be done for the fig tree.

This Lent and afterwards, I would ask us all to work on our Christian mercy. I would like us to think about how we can be more merciful with those around us, and refrain from quick judgments. In some cases, it may be a simple act of forgiveness, but in other cases, it may mean working with those to whom you want to be merciful. But, as we travel this road, I think many of you will grow in appreciation of what our Lord tried to tell us in this parable. And I hope and pray we will all grow to be better, more merciful Christians.

Amen.



Request for a Bishop Coadjutor

The Standing Committee of the Missionary Diocese of All Saints has selected our next Search Committee. Four of those on the committee come from the Convocation of the West, three from the Convocation of Central United States, and two from the Convocation of the East. There are two more from the East that are currently under consideration but have not yet been approved to join the Search Committee

This will be a very important period for our Diocese. Therefore, I am asking everyone to pray for Bishop Lipka, for the Standing Committee, and for the Search Committee. Please pray by name for our Search Committee, Fr. Larry Barnhill, Deacon George Barnett, Ms. Jenny Cole, Mr. Nicholas Smith, Ms. Cassandra Strubbler, and our own Fr. Harley Crain, Fr. Michael Jarrett, Fr. Jonah Kelman, and Mr. Karl Oles. Please pray that they will be guided by the Holy Spirit to choose a Godly man, right for the job and inspired to follow our Lord Jesus Christ so that MDAS will continue to strive to be part of the Lord's one, true, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

God bless,
Fr. Michael Penfield
Vicar General

THE TRULY FIRST AMENDMENT

BY THE RIGHT REV. WINFIELD MOTT

“Once I was a sinner, but now I am a Christian,” go the words of an old evangelical song.

It’s a great fantasy, and there are people who believe it. I once had a Nazarene tell me that he had not sinned for twenty-five years, since he was converted to Christianity. Unfortunately, this view is not confirmed by Scripture. “In your sight, no man living is righteous” (Psalm 143:2) is only one of many comments in both Old and New Testaments, conveying the message that we have all fallen short of perfection, a condition which lasts our entire life, and for which there is no cure. Becoming a Christian does not remove our sinful state. Ironically, my Nazarene friend was sinning as he spoke, by spouting the falsehood that he had achieved sinlessness.

Yet the myth persists, that Christians are without sin, or nearly so (some identifying a few small and almost cute sins attributable to church people). Non-Christians also often are convinced that Christians believe they are righteous. This leads to the charge that church people are hypocrites, claiming to be righteous but actually being sinners like everyone else. This contention has been reinforced by media disclosures of wholesale abuse of children by priests and by various and not infrequent scandals of clergy, evangelists and other church types defrauding, committing sexual sins, stealing, loudly supporting morally despicable political leaders and twisting vulnerable minds in cult settings.

If you need proof that original sin is rampant, these episodes certainly are evidence. In the media, all this is happening to someone else, as we view the screen, as indeed it is. Yet original sin is not limited to the rich and notorious/ famous. Your shortcomings, failures and moral lapses and mine are mercifully not broadcast on the media like the rich and famous. But they are just as real.

That is why a proper Anglican view of diversity is that we have none. The only category of people in our churches consists of sinners, nobody else. All sinners are welcome, though, without exception and certainly without erecting human barriers to

inclusion, such as race, economic condition, national origin, sexual orientation and the like. If you are a Christian, you are in this one inclusive category. It is just that somehow a lot of churches don’t seem to have gotten the memo. Church for many is where you pretend to be “a good person,” and you don’t talk about your sins or those of your fellow parishioners and certainly not of the clergy. Not unless you are trying to make a point that they, because of their sins, should not be included in the community. In the ACNA, which has so little trust in its bishops that it requires them to be monitored electronically to watch that they do not stray into any unapproved areas of the internet, it is not surprising that many congregants also are unclear on the nature of sin, and especially its universality.

So if you are seeking something to give up for Lent, might I suggest pretending might be a good choice, especially in church. Consider it carefully, though. There may be consequences if you do. The fact is that many church people are not in tune with Jesus’ welcome to all, and especially to the marginalized and those considered by the religious people of his day to be sinners (think of the parable in Luke (18:9-14) of the Pharisee and the publican (often translated as “tax collector”).

Whatever you do, Lent is an excellent time to ask the hard questions to yourself. Have I become so comfortable with myself and with pretending even to myself that I have risen above the need for God’s grace in any appreciable measure? Perhaps Jesus could skip the Cross in my case, because I am not a sinner like others. Probably one lash would suffice for my insignificant transgressions. If this describes you, note that it is the Publican in Jesus’ account who is justified, even as all he can say is “God have mercy on me, a sinner.” The elaborate presentation by the Pharisee of all his good deeds and righteous acts leave him unjustified before God. Thus, until you grasp the stark reality that you are helpless before God, God can’t get through to you to bestow his undeserved grace.

Part of the problem is the evolution of the word “sin.” The world often sees “sin” as an archaic term, used only by judgmental

church people to denounce others for misdeeds that the world no longer sees as wrong. Or possibly, used as an enticing term to describe chocolate or perfume as “sinfully delicious.” As important words evolve in language, there comes a point of “fight or flight,” where we need to either find a new word conveying the meaning more accurately to modern ears or find some way to widely communicate the real meaning of the old word.

In applying this personally, understand that whatever the word, the point is that you and I are failures to be what we should be. Some respond to that clarity by losing their self-worth, and are paralyzed. Yet a clear understanding of your worthlessness is meant to lead, as with the Publican, to throw yourself on the mercy of God. God’s grace is bestowed, and your worth is recovered, not by your moral strivings, but by his grace, given freely to people he created and who he made his children in baptism.

The process by which God bestows grace on those who, realizing their own ineptitude to fix themselves, cast themselves on the mercy of God, is the story of the Gospels, the Church Year and the Eucharistic Liturgy. Lent is an annual opportunity

in your life to sort out the workings of your state of being, be clear on your need for grace, define your goals in light of your status as a hopeless failure made whole entirely by God’s love and grace, and seek to live your life in response to these facts.

There is an eloquent phrase used in Anglican confession.



After receiving absolution, the forgiven penitent prays to have “time for amendment of life.” The purpose of amendments is not to repeal what is, nor to change basic direction. It is to improve the existing way of doing things, in this case the stewardship of our life. You are in the middle of life and improvement is needed. Recognizing, through internal examination as a penitent, or perhaps through the guidance of a confessor or friend, that you are in need of correction, and then receiving absolution for the wrongs done or rights not done, you hope for time to do the amending necessary to ensure that the future

will be better. This Lent is a grand time for amendment of life. Then the glorious Easter proclamation of grace through Christ’s resurrection can resound with new impact, as one more helpless sinner is embraced in the love of God.



Upcoming Synod & Clericus 2023

IT'S RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER!

This year’s Regional Synod will be conducted in conjunction with our Annual Clericus. The Anglican Convocation of the West will be holding both in Mesilla, New Mexico, April 18, 19, 20 and 21.

The plan is to have both our Regional Synod and our Clericus in person, but we will be conducting both using our hybrid model that we used last year, if necessary.

Please register on-line using the Convocation of the West’s web page. Also, please let our Vicar General know if you are going to attend these meetings and whether it will be “in person” or “via Zoom” as soon as possible.

PLEASE ALSO NOTE: Each Parish has the right to at least TWO lay representatives for the Synod. Please have these people register on line, even if they will only be attending on Zoom.

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.

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