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THE LINE

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

LET US WALK THROUGH THE DOOR

By The Right Rev. Winfield Mott



Death, "sweet death," a friendly visitor sent by God to release us from the "vale of tears?" Or death, the ultimate enemy, the curse set upon us for our sins?

In the Middle Ages, it became a popular thought that the spiritual side of life was good, and the material side was, at best, neutral. In this thinking, our souls were good and, if we behaved properly, would eventually be rewarded by God after death. On the other hand, our bodies were seen simply as a necessary container, to be discarded after death. Some even viewed the body as a prison to escape, set free at death to fly away in immortality.

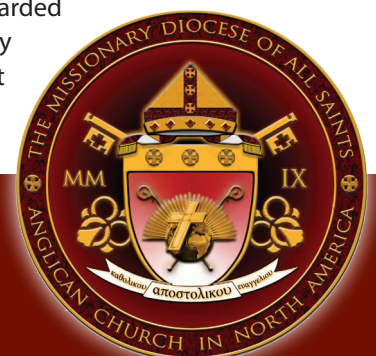
Much of this thinking carries over into our modern time, both in and out of the Church. Many Christians accept this as their own belief, and it never occurs to them that every Sunday, they state their Faith in the words of the Creed: "I believe in the resurrection of the body."

In the modern age, an added twist is that trendy theologians and their followers say these words, but mean them as somehow simply a symbolic, rather than actual, resurrection of the body. The increasingly unchurched society around us keeps a vague memory of life after death as a happy place, much like pagan concepts, where heaven is like earth, only everything is better.

The Christian belief in the resurrection of the body is in

contrast to this. On this good earth, we are told that everything is created by God, without exception, and that it is all good (Genesis 1:31). Only mankind's choice to rebel against God, reject his love and contradict his will has amended this universal goodness. But our sin does not change the goodness of all creation, it simply blasphemes it. Even when mankind uses the body for sinful purposes, or distorts the soul away from the worship of God and conformity to his will, their basic creation remains good. Through the love poured out on the Cross, we are called to be the unblemished image of God. In the sacramental act of baptism, our sinful self is drowned and we rise to a new life joined forever with our loving Savior.

From the day of our baptism, we are indelibly marked as his. Even as we, in our spiritual weakness and bodily obsessions, continue to sin, his love continues to call to us. Even as death remains an implacable enemy, his victory on the Cross continues for all generations to lead us through the suffocating waters to new life beyond. All that we are is included in this journey. The body is not discarded on the shore, the soul does not fly away. We do not avoid death, but through Christ, we share in the



The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

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

triumph over it.

This is the Easter proclamation. It is not, "Christ is immortal," it is "Christ is risen," risen from the tomb of death, the whole Jesus, transformed in body and soul, but fully present, with a physical form which has substance (Thomas, remember, puts his hands into the wounds) and eats material food.

As such, our modern age, with its focus on reality, needs a reality check. The Cross and Resurrection are in fact the center of the history of the world. We state their reality in the Creed, but the momentous life-changing events of Holy Week culminating in the Resurrection receive little or no mention in our history books. They are relegated in the modern mind to the parallel "religious" universe, regarded not as facts but as optional beliefs.

Yet history is not a science of absolutes. Historians have a wide range of theories and beliefs about what actually happened in the past and why. These debates are as much about Julius Caesar or Alexander the Great as they are about Jesus (when secular historians even bother to discuss Jesus). The Resurrection happened in the real world, "under Pontius Pilate," that is, during Pilate's term as governor, in a real place that is still standing, Jerusalem, on a specific Sunday at the end of Passover. It happened to a real person, not a mythical figure, who had a real body. It was also recorded by more real people, including the Gospel writers, who are telling us history. It is documented in greater detail than almost any other event in the same century, and therefore stands out as real history, not religious myth. It is, in fact, the defining moment of all being, with momentous consequences for the entire created order, including you and I.

We began with a question about the meaning of death. But perhaps the question needs to be inverted. Is life an experience

to be endured in this "vale of tears" until we are released? Or is life a gracious gift to be treasured and enjoyed for as long as it may last? God has created us, in love, to live as a key component of his glorious creation. Our failure as a species to respond to that love, rebelling instead, has caused death to intrude (see Gen. 3, also Jeremiah 8:5-15). God's final answer is Jesus Christ, who resolves the issue with the Resurrection, so that the Christian answer is a triumph of life as given to us by God, "trampling down death by death." It is all done, not in a "religious" or "spiritual" corner, but in the center of all the history, material and spiritual, of this sacred creation.

As the author John Updike, has eloquently and accurately recorded it:

"Make no mistake: if He rose at all
It was as His body;
If the cell's dissolution did not reverse, the molecules re-knit
the amino-acids rekindle, the Church will fall
It was not as the flowers, each soft Spring recurrent
It was not as His Spirit in the mouths and fuddled eyes of the
eleven apostles
It was as His flesh: ours
The same hinged thumbs and toes
The same valved heart
That-pierced-died, withered, paused, and then
Regathered out of Enduring Might, new strength to enclose
Let us not mock God with metaphor,
Analogy, side-stepping transcendence;
Making the event a parable, a sign painted in the faded
credulity of earlier ages:
Let us walk through the door."

Christ is risen! Indeed he is risen!



Upcoming Synod & Clericus 2023

IT'S NOT TOO LATE!

If you have not registered yet, but want to come, PLEASE register now so we can provide a count for the Retreat Center. PLEASE also register if you are going to be on our Zoom Conference so I can provide you with a link.

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!



LIVING IN THE VALLEY OF DRIED BONES

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

“Again the hand of the Lord came upon me, and brought me by the Spirit of the Lord, and set me in the midst of the plain, which was full of human bones. So He led me round about them, and behold, there was a great multitude of bones on the face of the plain. They were very dry.” [Ezekiel 37:1-2]

This has been and continues to be a very strange Lent for me. When I arrived from France, I was severely jet lagged. I have never felt so exhausted in all my travels. Whereas the worst jet lag usually takes about nine (9) days, this one has taken me three (3) weeks to fully recover. As a result, I entered Lent unprepared. I adopted my “usual” fasts and prayers just because I had to act quickly. Although the prayers and services have been wonderful and powerful, I have been bombarded with distractions, temptations, and a feeling of being “dried out.” Although this verse from the 22nd Psalm clearly refers to what Jesus went through on that fateful day on Golgotha, it constantly comes back to me as a personal refrain:

“My strength is dried up like a potsheard, and my tongue cleaveth to my gums.” [Psalm 22:15a]

I prayed for guidance and the Holy Spirit to help me write this article, but nothing came. I was a dried up bone. Then once again we had a school shooting in Nashville. But this time, it was a private Christian school. I then also remembered; about a month ago I saw on the French news about a shooting in a private school in the Bordeaux area of France. The evil that has haunted our children in public schools can no longer be kept out of private schools. There is no “safe space” left. And it hit me why I was experiencing this feeling of being all dried up. God was trying to tell me something: We live in a time of dried bones.

Do not get me wrong, there are parts of the world that are

still alive and vibrant, usually third and some second world countries. But, in the first world countries, we live among these dried bones. And, although there are vibrant, living beings in our society, many are not. They have become dried bones. Now, let me explain.

We must differentiate between what passes as being alive and what it truly means to BE alive. Being alive means feeling deeply, both the bad and the good. It means being engaged with the immediate world around us. It means loving, and yes hating, but it means that the emotions are genuine and not what we are TOLD to feel. And it means feeling those “bad” feelings that we are told we should not feel, i.e. feeling alone, or depressed, or discontent. It means being hungry for our next calling. And it means above all else being engaged with God – both listening and hearing what He is telling us.

Of course, now a day, I have to put in the required warning: I am NOT speaking of schizophrenia. I am talking about a genuine engagement and relationship with God. And the only reason that the warning has to be included is because our society teaches that such a relationship must be based on a mental illness. If you cannot see it, it must not exist. Unfortunately, they have learned nothing from science, but that is another topic.

Although we have more means of communication and although we have never had so many people in the world, we are the most disengaged, isolated people that has ever existed. We live on our phones or our computers, communicating on social media. Our world is on TV or the Internet, and our friends are actors or commentators. We stream, but we do not engage. However, these are not real. There is no real communication, argument, or discussion with a “real” person. People feel quite

comfortable to say the most horrendous thing on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or TikTok that they would never say face to face with someone. And the anger seems to escalate beyond human reasoning.

I remember going out to a Japanese restaurant with friends of mine. In San Jose, the Chinese were burnt out of our town in the 1890s, but the Japanese remained. They even returned after the internment during World War II. So, although we do not have any good Chinese restaurants in the downtown area, we have some of the finest Japanese restaurants. Now, one of my friends is a teacher, a speech pathologist in her school. I went to the restroom after her, and when I came back, I must have looked disgusted, which I was. She picked up on it immediately and told me that she knew exactly why I looked that way. As you approach the restrooms, there was a young couple with their baby in a stroller next to them. They were sitting at the sushi bar, eating their sushi. But while they were doing this, the father held a phone in front of their child, showing animated videos to the child. I presume they did this to keep the child placated while they dined, thus insuring a quiet night. But the child was mesmerized – and not in a good way. This is our society in a nutshell.

The first world countries know how to placate. They know how to medicate our feelings away, how to distract us better than the ancient Romans were able to do with circuses, and how to keep us disengaged. None of this was a premeditated decision. It came naturally, step by step. But it still came. “It is not natural to feel depressed, or sad, even after the death of a loved one.” “It’s all for fun.” “It’s harmless.” But the trouble is, it is not harmless.

Our young men especially have become isolated and violent. Many of these young men have been playing video games since youth. Like so many types of entertainment, they want things that are more and more exciting, and that means violent. Look at our movies. Many of our action films have the same theme – a lone man must act on his own to right what is wrong – often with a gun. Our society is broken, and we need to fix it. But our “leaders” seem incapable of doing so. One group wants a return of the assault weapon ban; the other group wants better mental health intervention to help these predominantly young men. As a result, they veto each other’s plan. Although I am fine with the return of the assault weapon ban, it is NOT a cure. France has one of the strictest gun laws and yet that young person got a gun and

killed, I believe, four people in that Bordeaux school. An enraged father beheaded another teacher in a northern town in France because he thought the teacher was criticizing Islam in their civics class. Without engaging with the real problem, nothing can be solved. All you can achieve with any kind of gun ban is a temporary respite to help with a better plan.

But here is the thing: we Christians DO have an answer. Christianity can create real relationships, real discussions, and the one thing our society is desperate for, real communities. And this is crucial that we re-establish the church as a community after COVID.

All our churches need to discuss how to create a real community that supports each other. And then it must find a way to invite others, especially young people, and most especially young males, into that community. It should NOT be a program that keeps these young people separated from the others at church. It needs to have, on one level, an engagement with ALL types of people – young, old, friendly, obnoxious, interesting and even boring. Everyone is welcomed at the Eucharistic Feast, then why aren’t they invited into our communities?

Unfortunately, many of our members got burnt in their other churches. They felt excluded and ostracized. They were not welcomed. So they left. They formed communities of like people. As understandable as this is, and as frightening as it is to invite a “new” group in who act, talk, and speak a little differently, we must do so. And by doing so, it creates a true community as opposed to just a social club.

Community has been critical to Christianity since its inception.

We need to engage in creating true communities in all our churches. And, if it is any incentive, the churches I have visited in the Western Convocation, which are growing and are dynamic, all have a good sense of community. They may have some time separated with each other to engage in areas of growth specific to that group, such as Catechism classes, but they still come together to worship, to share a meal, to talk, and to engage with others who are NOT like themselves. Let us make this the year we engage in community building and outreach. Let us be an oasis in a land of dry bones. And if we do this, we may be able to bring life back to these dry bones of our society, God willing! And God bless.

Amen.

