

# THE LINE

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

## Our Discernment and Clericus

The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

Today, I was planning to publish our fourth article on the Seven Churches listed in the Book of Revelation. However, we had our annual Clericus in conjunction with our Regional Synod the week after Easter (also known as Bright Week), and I thought it best to report on it. Although the business of the Convocation of the West and the Missionary Diocese of All Saints was taken care of during the Synod, the most interesting segment and the one I would like to report took place during the Clericus wherein we discussed our discernment and also our vision for the future of this Convocation.

When we shared what the Lord had placed in our hearts, we discovered basically three messages. The first message was a call for all of us to help those who are less fortunate than ourselves. The image that this priest received is of a very poor African woman sitting in church. This vision calls to mind that great passage from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew:

*"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come*

*to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'" [Matthew 25:37-40]*

It seems clear that we must reinvigorate our charity and concern for others, especially the "least" of our brothers and sisters. During the COVID shut down of our churches, many of our charitable works may have suffered. We need to resuscitate them. We may want to make charitable giving for foreign missions our charity of the year for our church, or dedicate the collections from the fifth Sunday to a worthy cause for the poor overseas.

But charity does not have to be in some foreign country. We have many in need in our own country. Malnourished children and the homeless are two such worthy causes. Maybe our churches could have a quarterly charitable day when the parishioners work at a food bank or a homeless shelter. Maybe even sorting clothing to help in the distribution of clothing to the poor would be something we can do. But whatever we do, we should do it with the

### The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

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knowledge that, in each face we see and help, we witness the face of God. And each time we serve the poor, we serve God.

The second message was that we must go out, preach Christ crucified, and make disciples of others, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we need to embrace the Great Commission that Jesus gave us [Matthew 28:16-20]. But there was more. This priest also said that we are to raise up priests and deacons to help in the Great Commission.

Again, the COVID lockdown prevented many of us from being good evangelists, but Bishop Mott reminded us of one of his favorite quotations. Being an evangelist is as simple as

one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. And the bread of which we speak is the Bread of Life, namely Jesus Christ. He gives us this Bread [see John 6] and then it is our duty to share it and to tell others where they too can get it.

The last message for our period of discernment was that we must get right with God, especially in our worship. We need to return to worshipping God “in the beauty of holiness” [see Psalm 96:9]. More especially, Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, “*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and*

*those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*” [John 4:23-24] It does not matter if we use the 1928 or 2019 Book of Common Prayer. What matters is the sincerity of the worship, the beauty of the worship as a gift to God, and the truth maintained in and through that worship.

This too may have suffered during the Pandemic. We may have gotten sloppy, or we may start believing that things like beauty aren’t important to God, but as these

passages reveal, they are. We need to start coming back to our churches to worship as a community, and we need to reinvigorate our worship endowing it with beauty, sincerity, and truth.

As you can imagine, these messages of discernment stimulated discussion. And the questions that we felt each parish needed to ask itself were “What is the Charism of our church? And why do we believe this?” This, in turn, resulted in our new Vision Statement and Value Statement. Now, please be advised, this is a working document. We will be talking about it during our upcoming Zoom Clericuses, and I will be checking in monthly to see how we are progressing. So, let us start with our Summary Statement:

We are “*A missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith in the Anglican tradition.*”

We are missionary in that we are trying to grow our churches and reach others for Christ. I remember someone telling me that MDAS was designed to be a refuge for churches, which did not ordain women and were members of Forward in Faith. According to one priest, being a refuge was not a compelling statement. We needed to be proactive. We need to be reaching others. And this is why we need to define ourselves as missionary – like the original disciples.

Second, we need to learn how to define ourselves without negatives, such as that we do not ordain women. Defining ourselves as having a historical faith explains why we only ordain men to be priests and bishops. This is our church’s historical record from its inception, and we feel we cannot change it until the Church as a whole changes this tradition. Additionally, our faith is Biblical because it is based in the Bible. We should be teaching, reading and living the Bible. And finally, we manifest our Christianity in our worship and theology within the Anglican tradition.

Our Mission and Vision statement is:

*“We are a missionary people living out the historical, Biblical Christian faith*

- *Making disciples of Jesus Christ*
- *Bearing fruit in every good work*
- *And increasing in the knowledge and love of God.”*

“Making”, “Bearing” and “Increasing” are all New Testament Biblical terms with each of these bullets pointing directly to the Bible.

Our Values and Commitments are all the result of the guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit. And so, this is where we start:

*“Guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit:*

- *We are committed to glorifying God in thought, word, and deed.*
- *We are committed to passing on the ancient Christian faith as it has been delivered through the Anglican tradition.*
- *We are committed to cultivating and equipping the whole people of God for the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world.”*



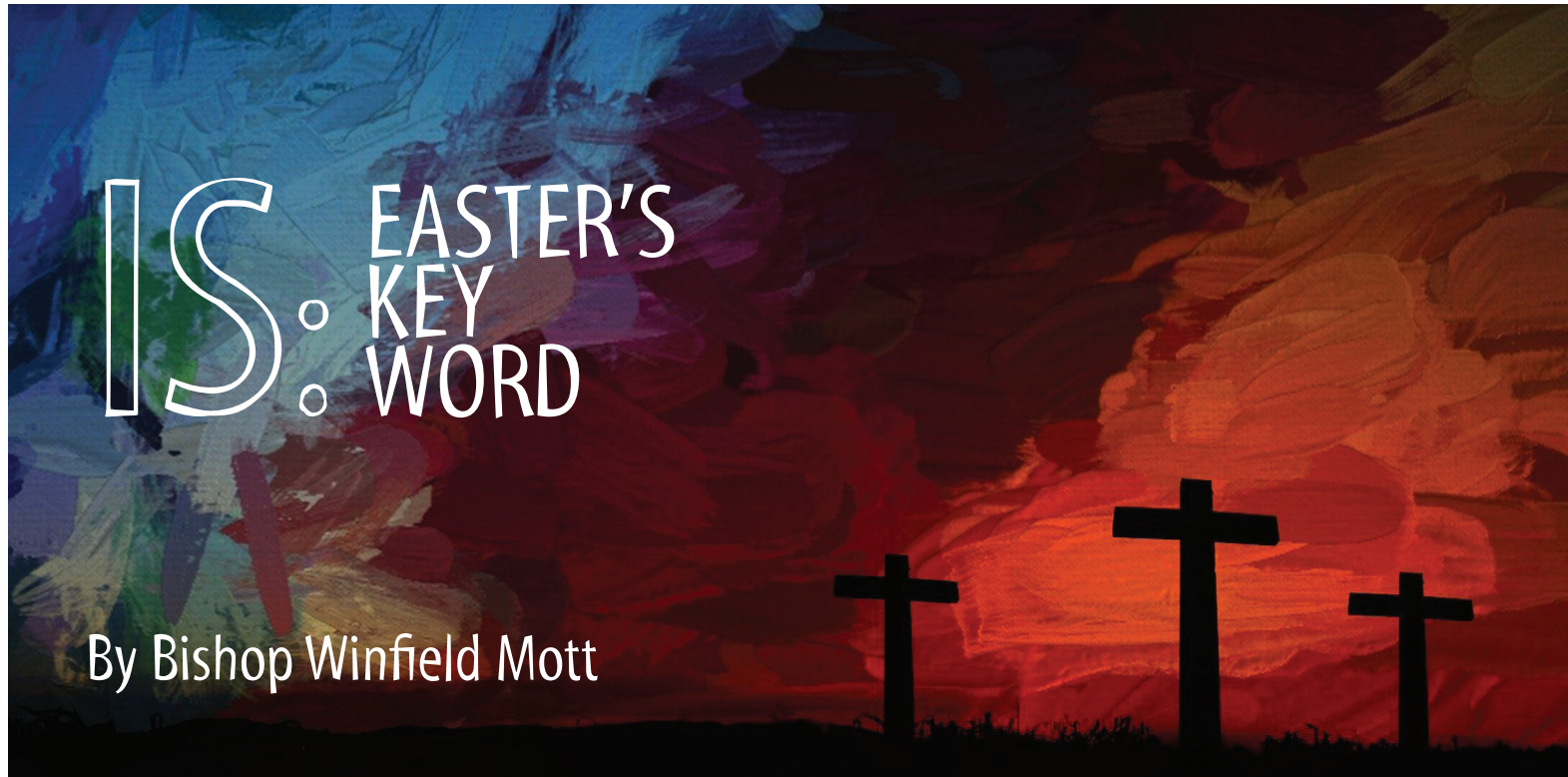
With each of these values comes the need for each parish to ask themselves “how?” How are we going to glorify God? How are we going to pass on our Anglican tradition? And how are we going to cultivate and equip our people to be ministers of Jesus Christ? And one of the points discussed was educating our parishes as to what these things mean; in other words, cultivating a catechesis for all parishioners that will prepare them for the ministry inherent in our Christian faith.

To help with these values and commitments, each month I will have a brief article on one of these values. I hope I will

be able to cite what one of our churches is doing to promote the value discussed so others can use these ideas and maybe modify them to fit their particular church.

We are very excited about our new vision for the Convocation of the West. And, if we all commit to following this vision, we will see a change in our approach to ministry. But remember, only through God does the world hear His Word, and only through God can we hope to change the world.

Amen.



Sadly, we live in a confused and distorted world. Easter Day has again come and gone. Now, several weeks into the Easter season, there is nothing left to remind North Americans that Easter occurred, let alone the historical event it represents. For us as Catholic Christians, it has the feel of being a small staff of the sane charged with caring for a large number of mental patients with a wacky worldview. Frequently, it is the latter who appear in charge, and the consequences range from the humorous to the tragic.

The reality is that Christ is risen, it happened. The event is not a religious legend, but an historical fact. In the mind of most of our fellow citizens, including a significant number claiming to be Christian, or at least religious, whether Christ is risen or not is a matter of belief. For them, this is a personal religious belief, kept in a separate mental, legal and educational place from real, historical or scientific facts. They stoutly defend the “right” to hold this belief as a private

choice, but they would be very upset if Resurrection were to be affirmed as historical fact, alongside any other historical fact, be it George Washington crossing the Delaware, Hannibal crossing the Alps or Lewis and Clark crossing the West.

Bishop Keith Ackerman recounts growing up in the Johns Valley of Pennsylvania, filled at the time with immigrants from Eastern Europe, mostly Eastern Orthodox or Byzantine Catholic. From Easter Eve and throughout the forty days of the Easter season, they greeted everyone with “Christ is risen.” As Bishop Keith comments, now that it has been replaced with “Have a nice day,” something important has been lost. Because, simply, Christ is risen, not because I think so, but because it happened.

The wacky worldview divides into several categories;

1. Some regard it as a preposterous idea that Christ is risen. They are in denial of the historical truth. While many of them accept a range of questionable information, be it Q-anon,

the innate goodness of humanity, the fascist ideal of a pure race, the intellectual superiority of modern man, and of those in charge, a flat earth, the absolute finality of the latest scientific theory, the incredible coincidence of energy and matter somehow inventing themselves and coming together without God to create the world, and all manner of other myths, they cannot see the well documented and witnessed Resurrection evidence.

2. Others accept the Resurrection as a religious belief, as mentioned above, but not as historical fact. Many have a mystical notion that the religious category of facts exist if I believe them, but not otherwise. They are not objective reality. Their value is in helping people cope with life, and they have verity in explaining some abstract concepts of life, similar to the folk and religious mythology of many peoples, especially primitive ones. As a result, some can confess the Creed, but they mean a belief in life which renews itself, not in the historical reality of Christ's physical Resurrection.

As an historian, I note that the source information surrounding the event is far more, both in quantity and quality, than much information about ancient times routinely accepted and taught. It is, of course, also a matter of belief. Everything is. I believe, for example, in the regular arrival of sunrise, and I believe in the Resurrection. But both are true whether I choose to believe it or not, just as both have an impact on the world without regard to what I believe. The morning will not remain dark if I choose to deny the sunrise. Nor will the world remain in death if I choose to reject the Resurrection.

This brings us back to that little word "is." Christ is risen. There are no qualifiers or caveats. He just is, it has occurred, nor can it be repealed or amended.

There is something else about the "is." It is present tense. So much of religion manifests as future tense, especially in contemplating the fallout from the Resurrection. Christ rose so that we might have [a future] eternal life when we die, "pie in the sky bye and bye," as the Wobblies song described it. Yet the New Testament makes it very clear that Resurrection comes to us in our baptism, not in our demise. In baptism, we die with Christ, that we might rise with him. Christians may indeed have a bright future. But Resurrection has already happened for us. We live a new life,

in the present reality of the Resurrection. While we mature to completeness, we live it in the Body of Christ, not in waiting outside the gates.

Christ is present. That means he is current, not in the past nor in the future. And it means, in another sense of "present," that he is here. He is risen in the present tense and in Eucharistic presence. Ulrich Zwingli argued that Christ could not be present in the Eucharist because he is now resident in heaven. It is the worldview of an unfortunately small mind. Jesus says to the thief on the neighboring cross, "Today you shall be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43), because the eighth day has arrived, the only memorable day for the resurrected baptized. Our day right now may be cluttered with all manner of evil or useless spiritual and physical debris that distracts and impedes us. But today, we are also, more importantly, "incorporate in the mystical Body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people" (BCP 1928). Again, note the present tense of the statement. Contrary to Zwingli's notions, Christ is ubiquitous, big enough to be beyond space, and therefore able to be present simultaneously both in heaven and on earth.

It is, therefore, ironic that we resurrected people, dwelling in the incorporated presence of Christ, clearly give more weight to the Lenten season than to the Easter one. Once Easter Day is past, it seems like Easter celebration is swiftly replaced by a sense of relief, not a heightened sense of the Risen Presence. If Lent has been about us and our sacrifices to the extent that its conclusion means a relief because we can go back to "normal," surely we have missed the point that Lent is only a preparation for the really important season, which is now upon us.

"Christ who lives and reigns now," yes, Now. Today. "And ever, and unto ages of ages," as many prayers conclude. "This is the Day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it," as the Easter Liturgy declares, quoting Scripture. That Day didn't end at midnight on Easter Sunday. That Day, in fact, will never end, and it is here among us now. And if Christians can mope for forty days in Lent, surely we can manage forty days of rejoicing in the presence of the Bridegroom Eucharistically among us.

**Is.** Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. Today.