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THE LINE

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

PEACE ON EARTH



By Bishop Winfiled Mott

The melodious angelic messengers sent to announce the arrival on earth of the incarnate Messiah highlighted “peace on earth” as the keynote, along with glorifying God. They did not come to promise prosperity or power, be it personal, political, imperial or ecclesiastical. Prosperity and power were, in fact, two of the satanic temptations which Jesus rejected some years later as he began his ministry. His followers have frequently succumbed to these temptations, past and present. But Jesus did not arrive to save us from poverty or lack of power.

Peace remains the key to salvation. When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, they broke the peace, destroying the perfect harmony of creation’s and mankind’s relationship with God. Ever since, our species has been in conflict with everything and everyone, including other humans and God himself. The sin of the Fall has often been trivialized, but its essence is attempting to become gods, rather than basking as God’s beloved children and being stewards of his earth, a paradise created lovingly for his creatures. Jesus became incarnate to

initiate the process of restoring that relationship through his loving sacrifice of the cross, that we might be turned again from conflict to peace.

In achieving this, it is important to note that peace has categories. An analogy is the rings circling a tree trunk. The outermost circle is the most obvious, the absence of war. The next circle is community peace, a safe and secure local environment to live in. Then comes the circle of domestic and family peace. The next is individual peace, a person who has resolved inner conflicts which would otherwise disturb him or her. Finally, the innermost circle is spiritual peace, restoration of the harmony and trust an individual soul has with God, and therefore with everything and everyone.

Because war is so clearly destructive and traumatic, many do not go further in defining peace than to mean there is no war. But in fact, the achieving of real peace, like the flow of life-giving sap in a tree, flows outward from the center. People with peaceful souls do not start wars, threaten communities, cause domestic violence or agonize over inner conflicts. Unless the



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.”*

central circle is addressed, the problem can never be solved for long.

The concept is baked into Christian ethics by Jesus. In his basic ethical teaching, the Beatitudes, he includes “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Achieving peace is not a passive resignation but a pro-active energy in bringing about resolution to conflict. The ability to be at inner peace yourself, yet confront and cure conflict in others, is indeed a blessed gift, even as it is a mandated task for ethical Christians.

When Jesus interprets Jewish Law, the results are consistent with his teachings contained in the Beatitudes. The Law commands us to love God and neighbor. Jesus is asked the weasel question, “But who is my neighbor?” It is asked in the hope that my neighbor will be defined as someone who I like and who is much like me. Many rabbis suggested exactly that. Instead, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan.

When he is done, it is very clear that my neighbor includes everyone, and perhaps especially those whom I have previously despised, resented or shunned. And when Jesus interprets “Thou shalt not kill,” all the circles of peace are involved, and even being angry at someone breaks this commandment. This is in stark contrast to the rabbinic discussions, which instead narrowed the definition to “thou shalt not murder,” to absolve those who kill in wars or various disputes. Likewise, “thou shalt not commit adultery” for Jesus involves your inner feelings towards others, and is not limited only to the specific act of physical sex. In all this, it is only the peaceful soul who can manage the inner tranquility necessary.

Thus, people long have greeted each other with, “Peace be with you, shalom, salaam.” Jesus also uses this greeting, not surprisingly since it is a standard greeting. It has been fixed in the Christian liturgy since the beginning and is central to the Eucharistic feast. In recent times, some have trivialized the liturgical greeting into a chat session, avoiding any contemplation of the purpose, which was to ensure conflict among the communicants was resolved before proceeding. But the real meaning remains, and can be recaptured by those serious about faithfulness to the Eucharistic core of worship.

The acceptance of the Three Wise Men or Three Kings into the incarnation narrative is a clear statement that the message is not only for Jews. Rather the Messiah has come to bring

salvation to all, just as all are in need of it, having shared in the universal Fall. Conflict is not a phenomenon limited to Jews. “We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” emphasis on “all.” But all are invited to return to the peace of God as well.

It is the story of the fallen world that peace among mankind has been in precious short supply. Wars continue. Over the centuries, more than a few have even been fought in the name of God, the ultimate oxymoron. Many more have been blessed by church leaders of various kinds, sometime resulting in both sides considering themselves “the army of God.” Likewise, as our nation struggles in civil conflict and polarization, some church leaders stand out as peacemakers, others as feeding the flames of conflict.

The message of peace, so strongly delivered by angel choirs and God’s Messiah and so central to the Faith, is still ignored

or disputed, including by many in the Church. Numerous Christians continue to advocate war against national enemies, hostility towards those neighbors of whom they disapprove, and personal disputes and enmities of all kinds. The fallen world is still fallen. We are called to repentance especially for the multiple sins of breaking God’s peace.

The inner core of peace at the center of the circles in the analogy of the tree trunk cannot be attained through simply finding a guru for meditation, or doing programmed contemplation or even by stress reduction. The life-giving flow which keeps a tree alive does not come from the tree but from outside nourishment flowing through the tree. Only God can truly provide peace for the soul, only Jesus can provide true peace for the world. It flows in eucharistic celebration from the Divine cup. Nor should God’s peace be mistaken for

indifference or removal from the cares and joys of the world, such as Buddhism promotes. It is quite opposite. Jesus did not exercise his inner harmony and peace by avoiding the world and contemplating life in some quiet corner of the universe, indifferent to the fate of the earth. The loving Creator exercised his peace by acting in love to restore the creation so lovingly formed by him.

In a disturbed world and troubled society, we need to hear again the angelic song, not only to achieve a “Merry Christmas,” but equally as a call to an ethics of peace as a way of being.





SAVE THE DATE

Upcoming Synod & Clericus

Please note that 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 (Bright Week).**

The plan at this stage is to have both our Regional Synod and our Clericus in person, but given the ins and outs of COVID, regulations and restrictions, we will be prepared to conduct both using our hybrid model that we used last year, if necessary.

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.

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!

A Call to the Church: Discernment

The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

When I was rector of a church, I was troubled as to what I could do and what I should do to grow it. I was also troubled by the apparent obsession with numbers, but the reality of the situation was that we needed a certain number of parishioners to make our church viable. Additionally, I was tired of the church growth models that had more in common with business models or the American culture than with faith, God and spreading the Good News about Christ. What was, and still is, more important to me was to reach others for Christ and to serve the parishioners properly, and not to gather a vast number of people into our church. I also found that, although some of the analyses were helpful, especially dealing with the personality of a small church congregation, it didn't help with the specifics of my church, its people or its location. And location was a huge issue for me.

My former parish is located in California, which is a difficult

mission area (like Washington and Oregon), but also is located nestled in the foothills, surrounded by multi-million dollar mansions. The neighborhood originally was agrarian and, later, modest suburban homes. But, because of its proximity to Palo Alto and Silicon Valley, it soon was filled with multi-millionaires who bought the old homes just to tear them down to build their McMansions, complete with high fences and gates. This makes missionary work quite difficult. No wonder Jesus pronounced that it was easier for a camel to pass through an eye of a needle than a rich person to enter heaven. The rich are so guarded and insulated, it is almost impossible to reach them with God's message! Add to this the physical location of the church, which is quite difficult to find, and you can imagine how most church self-help books did not work.

Then there is the idea that growing the church, reaching others for Christ and serving the parishioners properly is the

“job” of the rector. The idea of professional ecclesiology has done more to kill evangelism than any other concept. Additionally there is the nature of Anglicanism. Having a faith born as a national religion does not lend itself to evangelism. If you lived in England not so long ago, you were automatically assumed to be Anglican unless your parents made an affirmative effort to stop this assumption. Because our religion is born of this culture, longtime Anglican parishioners usually do not have a burning desire to evangelize beyond inviting someone who may like the service to come to our church.

My solution to all of this was to take the next Lent and make it a period of discernment for the church. I wanted all the parishioners to fast and pray and listen to God’s “still, small voice” as to what we should do next. And this is what I want us in the Convocation of the West to do. I would like us all, every member, to fast and pray this Lent to see where God wants us to go next as a Church. Whether we are part of a parish church or alone; whether clergy or lay; whether we are retired or active; I want us all to fast as best we can given age and health. And I want us all to pray. And above all, I want us to listen.

As everyone knows, listening has become a difficult thing for us in our culture. First, we are inundated with noise. Radios, TVs and the Internet are constantly on, constantly distracting, and constantly leaving no time for quiet reflection for most of us. Car radios, smartphones and GPS have removed one of the most private and quiet times for many of us – the car – especially those who lead busy lives. Those of us with young families can also attest to the normal noise, discussions and crises that come up and take up most of the rest of our “free time.” But, add to this our highly scheduled lives in our present culture, which allows for no down time for any adult or child, and all remaining free time is eliminated by other distractions.

Finally, our culture has deteriorated to the point that very few people want to hear what another has to say. I remember when a dear friend of mine asked me about something I just had said. I was shocked, not only because she was listening but also because she wanted the full explanation even though it was a view that she most likely did not share. And the irony in wanting to be heard is that if everyone is speaking then no one is listening. No one is listening because we are interrupting each other and talking over each other so that “we can be heard.” And we are not listening as a society because the “most important thing” is our own opinions (our own “truths”), and not the other person’s. Listening to the Lord is key in any period of discernment.

When we did our period of discernment at my previous parish, I asked everyone to offer up their prayers and sacrifices during Lent for our church’s discernment. I asked all to pray to God to give us wisdom as to whom we are to reach and how we are to reach them. God answered our prayers, but the answers were surprising.

Likewise now I am going to ask all the churches in the Convocation of the West to use this coming Lent as a period

of discernment, not just for our individual churches, but also for our Convocations and for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints. We need to pray that God will let us know to whom we are to reach and how to reach them. And we need to pray to God to let us know what we are to do so we can continue to be a Diocese that is a beacon of faith and hope and a light to the world. As you may suspect, our type of parish with its devotion to orthodoxy is becoming more rare, especially in the Anglican world. We need to be a witness, and we need to carry on beyond our immediate needs. And, in practical terms, this means reaching more people for Christ.

Then, in April, when we have our Clericus, we will come together, either in person or on Zoom, and discuss what the Lord has placed in our hearts as to what we are to do. You may also write to me with what God has placed in your heart, and I will share it. But do not worry if what God has put in your own heart is not the same as everyone else. We must all recognize that the Holy Spirit works in a very mysterious way. Each person’s mission may be different than the over-all mission of the church, the Convocation or the Diocese. And what is placed in our hearts may not be for the whole Convocation. Rather, it may appear to be specific to each of us, or to our parish, or to the Diocese. However, we must realize that each individual message will work together for the overall good of His Church.

Also, do not worry if the idea that is placed in your heart has nothing to do with outreach, per se. Rather, let us recognize that it may be something that the church needs in order to continue as Christ’s Church. And it may also impact outreach in ways we do not fully understand. So let us trust in what the Holy Spirit will place in our hearts.

Remember, our several discernments may work like a jigsaw puzzle. Separately, it may make very little sense, but brought together, it may form a very clear, coherent picture. We must also be prepared for more than one church mission. No one idea necessarily excludes all other ideas. So please do not exclude your piece of the puzzle. Please share your message no matter how different, or how specific, or how “unimportant” it may seem to you. Every idea from the Holy Spirit IS important.

Additionally, for the next seven months I will share the study I did on the seven churches mentioned by Saint John in Revelation. It will be one church per month. This may help some of you in your discernment for your individual churches.

So, let us prepare our parishes. Let us ask everyone to enter this period of discernment starting Ash Wednesday, which is March 2, 2022. And let us walk boldly into the unknown, trusting the Lord in this as in all things. And may the Lord bless us all in this new year.

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