

May 2023

Volume X, Number 5

THE LINE

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

REJOICE AND GET BUSY

By The Right Rev. Winfield Mott

It is well known that Lent has forty days. It is expected they will be spent in introspection, with consequent repentance and amendment of life. And what happens next? It appears to be a secret but I will share it with you: Easter has forty days as well. Once upon a time, they were spent in rejoicing and in living a response to the incredible gift of life of the Easter event.

Currently, however, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of the Paschal season. Observing church people, it appears to begin and end on Easter Sunday, although some Christians do take notice of Bright Week, the week following. That the Church provides a forty day nonstop festival is almost impossible to detect. Once, the news was too good to keep quiet about it. They greeted each other with "Christ is risen! Alleluia" for all forty days. Kneeling and fasting were forbidden. Joyful songs resounded. Celebrations were widespread.

The heritage of America has been crafted to be a Puritan one. And Puritans don't believe in festivals and rejoicing. They observed, but did not celebrate, the Sabbath. They regarded it, not as a celebration of the Resurrection, but as an obligation

imposed by the Commandment. As for holidays, even Christmas Day was not celebrated by them. A forty day festival would have been unthinkable.

Thus, we have the Church of today. The image is of a dour bunch of people, eager to condemn behaviors that are fun, and certainly adverse to manifestations of joy in church. They drove Christmas and Easter festivities out of the Church, which thus became secular events, with a focus on Santa Claus and an amazing egg-producing rabbit. Extensive immigration from more cheerful lands forced the observances back into many churches, but did not deter the secular patterns which had begun already during the nineteenth century. Humorless and somber decorum mostly prevail in churches. Father Alexander Schmemmann comments, "Of all accusations against Christians, the most terrible one was uttered by Nietzsche when he said Christians had no joy."

As a result of the loss of the forty days of Easter, the specific themes of the season have



The Convocation of the West Summary Statement

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

been obscured as well. If the consequence of the Lenten exercise is repentance and amendment of life, the strongest consequence of the Paschal observance is joy, unmitigated joy. Again, Schmemmann comments, "Without the proclamation of this joy, Christianity is incomprehensible. It is only as joy that the Church was victorious in the world, and it lost the world when it lost that joy." He points out that the Gospel message begins with this ("I bring you good tidings [=good news, Gospel] of great joy," the angel announced at Christmas in Luke 2:10) and ends with this ("They worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy," reports Luke as the final step in Jesus' ascension, Luke 24:52).

In what does this joy consist? It is a hard concept for us, because we live in, and are heavily influenced by, a culture that defines happiness as possessing stuff. The Puritan concept that God materially blesses those whom he favors leads in a direct line to the Prosperity Gospel. Yet, despite the affluence and consumer goods, the nation seems increasingly unhappy and angry. Millions get through the day only by dulling their psychic pain with mountains of legal and illegal drugs to stave off anxiety and depression. Is it time to reject the Puritans and Prosperity Prophets? Jesus notes that Mammon is a hard master, not a source of joy.

To use the Pauline analogy, as newborn babes can only tolerate milk, perhaps we can only begin with small steps to recapture the joy. "You must be joyful" is, of course, an exhortation of no value. Joy is not an obligation any more than it is a consumer product. Our source of joy is not found in religion, cultic observance, nor obedience to commandments. It comes from the power of the Resurrection, from that single, transforming fact, both historical and contemporary, "Christ is risen."

Without that single fact, even the richest world is desolate. With it, even the most hopeless world is rich. Therein lies the joy.

The next theme follows immediately, beginning with the epistle for Easter Day, 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. We, the risen people, are called to be a freshleaven in the lump of humanity, to rise within that inert mass as leaven does in bread. The old, full of malice and wickedness, is to be thrown away. The new, having died with Christ, now rises in him, full of sincerity and truth. On

Easter Day, it is enough to apprehend the fact of Resurrection and rejoice unhindered. In Easter season, however, there is a progression; the rejoicing of Easter day, followed by truth dawning through the multiple appearances of the risen Jesus, culminating in doubting Thomas being convinced. It continues with Good Shepherd Sunday, where we know that we are cared for by the shepherd. It then moves to Rogation Sunday, when the consequence translates to action; we move to "be doers of the Word and not hearers only" (James 1:22ff).

This is the final theme of the season. We are not to simply hear, as if Christ were a consumer product. "Are you saved?" is a question answered by a choice to act, not to passively

accept. Rogation Sunday is about our Liturgy. The word, as you perhaps know, means "the work of the people" in Greek. We do our liturgy of Sunday, the Resurrection day of the week, by offering the sum total of our activity and production of the previous week to God, summarized by bringing forward our bread and wine at the offering, and receiving it back filled with the Presence of Christ, to go with us as we do our liturgy in the world during the coming week.

Rogation Sunday is the day when the planting of the year's crops is blessed. This specific application of being "doers of the Word," of doing your liturgy as a farmer, was obvious to previous generations when people were overwhelmingly in an agricultural society. That connection is no longer direct, even though we still all depend on the crops produced. But the basic point is the same. We do

our liturgy in the world as stewards of God's earth which has been given to us. It is meant to nourish us, as we are meant to nurture it, all aspects of it.

The Resurrection of Christ has not happened so that our souls might be snatched from the material creation and spirited elsewhere. The Resurrection lifts all creation, including us, and begins the process of restoring it, and us, to be as intended in the beginning. Mankind has not only lost the joy implied in the process, but failed to do our part of the process itself. Modern man exploits nature instead of nurturing it, poisoning the earth and sky until our water, air and land are toxic. Modern man sees our fellow creatures, including humans, as either units of economic production or as enemies to be culled and destroyed.



For God, creation is good, as he made it to be. It still is. When human greed and selfishness are out of harmony with this, the whole earth groans with the tragedy of it.

The Easter message, starting at the empty tomb, therefore expands to challenge us: what manner of people do we wish to be? Supplemental to caring for the planet, James mentions on Rogation Sunday that “pure religion...is this: To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27). The visit is not just to chat, but to render material aid, in a time before there was a public social safety net for people in unfortunate circumstances. It is the same mandate from Jesus in Matthew 25 to care for the poor. It is a crucial part of the mandate to care for the planet, that we effectively care for humans who are in need.

There are no distinctions here. All in need represent the face of Jesus himself.

Being able to do our small part of the liturgy, caring for the planet, caring for needy humans, needy creatures, needy skies is an expression of Paschal joy, as is the direct sharing of such good news with others. As Easter season ends, we return to Luke 24:52: after witnessing the Ascension, “they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.”

May that joy, the essential byproduct of the Resurrection, be yours, as indelibly as the Resurrection itself. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.



Our Synod 2023

By The Very Rev. Canon Michael Penfield

On Wednesday, 19 April 2023, the Convocation of the West opened its Convocational Synod. Both the tenor and the demeanor of the Synod and those participating were different. The frustration level in the West is palpable. I do not know if it is because we have started our search for a Coadjutor for the Missionary Diocese of All Saints or if the level of frustration has been brewing for a while, but either way, it came to a head at the meeting. Looking for a new Coadjutor has caused parishioners and clergy to examine and evaluate what MDAS needs in a new Bishop. But some of the frustration has nothing to do with self-examination. It has to do with either a lack of action or a lack of communication – or both.

From what many said, most of the frustration seems to stem from a need for confirmations at the local parish, though parishes also expressed frustration as to the process for someone to become a Deacon. As a result, several motions were passed that we hope will help with some of these issues.

However, trying to sum up what others expressed is always difficult. One doesn't want to put words in another person's mouth or mischaracterize their statements. So, with God's help, I will try to convey these ideas accurately. I will then add what I

believe this all means. However, before delving into the opinions expressed, some background information is important.

Of the four Bishops within MDAS, two are retired and two are not. Three of the Bishops are currently unable to travel though once Bishop Lipka heals from his surgery, he may be able to travel again. When the Convocation of the West initially came into MDAS, Bishop Ilgenfritz tried to visit all the churches in the West. Some churches he visited in the same week if geographically close. There were only a few churches he was not able to visit before he fell ill with circulatory problems in his legs.

Bishop Lipka became Coadjutor and then Ordinary in short order. Then Covid hit and everything shut down. Visitations became impossible. But even before this, Bishop Lipka thought it impossible to visit all the churches in the Diocese each year. There were at that time about 35 churches scattered throughout the United States. When the Convocations were created in the East and Central areas, one of the ideas proposed was to have the confirmations at the Synod, making it possible to have those who need confirmation to obtain it each year. That is still the model, though we in the West discovered rather quickly how very hard this is for most of our people.

In the West, because of distance, traveling to the Synod for confirmation was almost impossible. School and work prohibited most travel. Money is another factor, especially if a whole family is to make the trip. The one person who tried to come to Synod for his confirmation had to bow out when his car broke down on the way to the Synod. Then there is the emotional element. Most people, who want to be confirmed, want to be confirmed in their home parish, surrounded by friends, family and the church that supported them on this important journey.

As a result of this, one of our priests produced a white paper and a resolution to help with this and other issues. This priest has had quite a bit of experience in missionary work in Africa. His experience there demonstrated to him how a missionary church must act. It must be flexible in order to serve all its parishioners and new converts. His desire is for MDAS and ACNA to start thinking as missionaries. His proposal is to change the rubrics within the 2019 Book of Common Prayer.

The proposal was to make it possible for the Bishop to delegate his authority to someone else, especially for confirmations, as needed. The same would also be available for the Bishop for Baptisms, Receptions and Reaffirmations. We would also add this same right to the Installation of a New Rector, though this was not clearly stated in the Resolution.

The reasoning rested on several factors. One is the inconsistencies that exist in the Prayer Book, requiring only a Bishop preside during Confirmation but that a priest could preside during a Baptism, if the Bishop is unavailable, and also the Renewal of Baptismal Vows, which is the same as the ceremonies for Confirmation and Baptism and occurs usually during the Easter Vigil.

The proposed language would replace "Only a Bishop" with "the Bishop, OR HIS DULY APPOINTED REPRESENTATIVE" or something with like wording. The idea is to give the Bishop flexibility when necessary so that we can do what Jesus asked Peter to do so many millennia ago, "Feed my sheep."

We know that the Roman Catholics allow their Vicars General to conduct Confirmations, laying their hands on the confirmands. We also know that the Lutherans permit their parish priests to do the same. We also know that missionary churches, especially in Africa, which have thousands of confirmands a year, permit this same type of flexibility. And we also know we have many people who want to be confirmed, but who are waiting for a Bishop to perform them when there are others who could, if permitted. And this came out as a very strong frustration in many of our churches.

Now, what must be understood is that this is not a quick fix. This resolution is to change the Prayer Book so that all of the

ACNA would change the same way. It is not the Convocation of the West alone, or MDAS alone. It must be a change to the Prayer Book, which results in a change throughout the ACNA. And it may have to go through the Provisional Council for this to happen.

As a result of this discussion, two additional proposals were also passed. The first is actually being considered by the council drafting the new Book of Occasional Services. It is a service for the Pastoral Liturgy for the Reception of a New Member using Chrism. It is only for those who did not receive Chrism at Baptism and may allow the new member to serve in those areas that do not require a confirmed member. This may include lay readers, acolytes, crucifers, or thurifers.

The second additional proposal is a little more controversial,

although the Standing Committee has discussed it as a possibility in the future. In order to help in the formation and training of Deacons, tonsuring of Subdeacons, licensure of Readers or Catechists in the West, the Synod proposed using Fr. Michael Jarrett's formational program that he and Bishop Mott created at Trinity on the Border Mission as a second seminary program. It will mean incorporating the same requirements as the current program in the East but will allow those who find it too difficult to travel to Maine to have another location that may work better. And, like the program in the East, it would not include the priesthood at this time.

Again, this second additional proposal was born out of frustration. Those at the Synod expressed their frustration that those who feel called to serve are being stymied in their pursuit of the Holy Order of Deacon. Many in the West expressed their belief that, although the priesthood requires a much greater amount of training, the diaconate should be relatively simple. If they then feel called to the priesthood, they would have to go through the necessary additional training and education to become a priest.

Although the Synod continued the following day to complete our Statement of Values and Goals, we will have to reserve that discussion for our next newsletter.

As we can all see, this Synod produced some worthwhile discussions and motions. At the very least, it makes very clear that we need to become more proactive and flexible in our mission to fulfill the Great Commission. We need to be able to respond quickly to the needs of our parishioners, and not frustrate them in their pursuit of their Christian faith within the Anglican Tradition. And, with God as our Helper, we may succeed.

Amen.

