

Epiphany 3 - Anglicans & Episcopalians, and Jesus at Nazareth

The Primates Meeting

- It's been an interesting month for the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church
 - We've been very near the top of the news in most of the major news outlets:
 - NYT: Anglican Church Disciplines U.S. Episcopalians over Gay Marriage
 - CNN: Episcopal Church Suspended from Anglican Communion
 - So this homily will be a Deacon's perspective of what went on in Canterbury and what that means for the Episcopal Church
 - And how I interpret that through the lens of the Mission Statement of Jesus, which we heard in today's Gospel

What happened in Canterbury?

- The head bishops—the Primates—of the Anglican Communion met at their gathering at Canterbury.

The
Primates
Meeting
- Primates (are featured prominently in the Tarzan series of books by Edgar Rice Burroughs and in the Anglican Communion)
 - Anglican primates are so called from the Latin, "pimat:" *of the first rank*, and they are the chief bishops of their provinces:
 - Michael Curry is the Primate of the Episcopal Church USA (known as the Presiding Bishop)
 - Archbishop Justin Welby is the primate of the Church of England, the Archbishop of Canterbury
- This Primates Meeting is one of the three gatherings that collectively are known as the Instruments of Communion of our Anglican Communion:

Instruments
of
Communion
- Lambeth Conference, the gathering of all the bishops, which meets every 10 years (next in 2018)
- The Anglican Consultative Council, which meets every 2-to-3 years (next in Lusaka, Nigeria in April 2016)

- Where each member church is represented by one bishop, one priest or deacon, and one layperson
- Primates Meeting, which meets every couple of years since 2002
- If we were to consider the Anglican Communion as a **Solar System**, these three meetings (these Instruments of Communion) would be the Sun around which the 38 provinces revolve. Instruments
of
Communion
- The Church of England, the Episcopal Church, the Church of the Province of Rwanda would all occupy their own orbits.
 - Each planet in this solar system is independent, it's autonomous;
 - Each planet has its own governance and its own way of doing things; many have their own Book of Common Prayer.
 - Yet, there is communication and collaboration between these various planets
- In our planetary system, the Archbishop of Canterbury is known as the First among Equals. First
Among
Equals
 - That's because all the churches of the Anglican Communion grew out of the Church of England and the expansion that occurred under the British Empire;
 - There are historians who argue that part of the reason the Archbishop of Canterbury lost his Pope-like status is thanks, in part, to the Episcopal Church of the United States.
 - Because in 1783, following the War of Independence, the parishes in Connecticut elected Michael Seabury as their bishop.
 - Bishop Seabury could not be ordained by the English bishops because part of that ceremony included swearing allegiance to the King of England as the Supreme Governor of the Church.
 - So Seabury turned to the Scottish Episcopal Church where he was ordained by the Scottish bishops, who did not swear this Oath (thanks to the events of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the overthrow of James II of England, also known as James VI of Scotland...which led to all those great bagpipe tunes about James' son Bonnie Prince Charlie, but that's another story).

- So let's return to the present, when, last Summer, the Episcopal Church of the United States, at its Triennial Convention, elected Michael Curry as its Presiding Bishop (the primate/chief bishop/archbishop) of the ECUSA
- At the same Convention, the Church decided, as a body, to embrace the equality of marriage.
 - This is part of the work that the Episcopal Church has been doing for over 40 years on Human Sexuality,
 - and last year, after many years of study, theological reflection,
 - our national church decided to embrace GLBTQ people in a way that would affirm their lives
 - GLBTQ: gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, queer
 - So marriages between same sex couples can now be blessed by the church.
- Naturally, there are some subtleties to all this. Marriages between all committed couples is permitted in those dioceses where that is permitted by the bishop,
 - or in dioceses where the bishop does not approve, there will be provisions made where that can happen pastorally for people.
 - So there are provisions for those who disagree, but we have been able to find ways that enable people to work, and pray together.
- The important point to remember is that marriage is a function of the State.
 - When a clergy person marries a couple, they are acting as an agent of the state.
 - But the big point of a Christian marriage ceremony is that the marriage is blessed by the community of faith, that the community will support this union and will welcome them as a family into the family of the church.
- Now, there are other provinces in the Anglican Communion that have difficulties with this understanding of marriage and human sexuality.
 - And it's been an issue that came to the breaking point when Bishop Gene Robinson—an openly homosexual—was elected as Bishop of New Hampshire.

This
Summer's
Convention

Marriage

Sunday, 24 January 2016

- This month, the Episcopal Church was not formally **admonished** by the Anglican Communion for upholding the equality of individuals; rather the Primates Meeting formally acknowledged the **distance** between the Episcopal Church and the other provinces:
 - “It is our unanimous desire to walk together. However given the seriousness of these matters we formally acknowledge this distance by requiring that for a period of three years The Episcopal Church no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed or elected to an internal standing committee and that while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity”
 - In other words, we’ll still have a voice, but no vote, but on what committees?
 - The decision of the Primates Meeting did not specify what these committees were.
 - The Rev. Gay Clark Jennings, president of the Episcopal Church’s House of Deputies, states that this decision has no effect on the **Anglican Consultative Council**, because the Primates have no authority over that Council
- There is an important point to remember about the three gatherings I mentioned before and the various Committees derived from these gatherings:
 - All these groups and commissions have no authority over the actions taken by the Episcopal Church, or even the church in Nigeria
 - No legal authority, no judicial authority, no theological authority.
 - The main reason they have these bodies is for people to carry on a conversation.
 - And that is all.
 - Look in The Anglican Communion on the Web and the words used to describe the work of the Anglican Consultative Council (Lusaka, Nigeria 8-20 April 2016)
 - “to *facilitate* the co-operative work to *exchange information help to co-ordinate* common action.
- So we are still a part of that *exchange of information*, but when that group starts to pretend...and we really mean pretend... to be a legislative body, we will have no vote.

Acknowledged
the Distance

Voice but No
Vote

Luke 4: 14-21

- This week's Gospel reading from Luke also speaks to this situation.
- We find Jesus, in the synagogue in his home town of Nazareth, announcing the keynote address about his ministry.
 - He is given the scroll, opens it to Isaiah 43:
 - The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*" And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, [and said], "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR

- We don't see this in our church bulletin, but the words, "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" stands alone in its own verse, Verse 19.
 - This is the key to Luke's story about the Ministry of Jesus: the **Year of the Lord's Favor**
- According to Jewish law (Leviticus 25:8-12), the year of the Lord's favor is the Jubilee year, which was celebrated every 49 years
- In the Jubilee Year,
 - It was a time to proclaim **liberty for all**; to **release slaves** (who had been sold into bondage to pay their debts) and **prisoners** (Lev 25)
 - to bring good news to the poor and let the oppressed go free (Is 61)
 - To cancel debts (Deut 15)
 - To restore property that was lost through non-payment of debt to its original family.
- In the Jubilee Year the people were to be restored to their full sense of community and right order:
 - The Jubilee Year would **restore the dignity** of each member of the community, no matter what their standing had become.

The Jubilee
Year

- Each person could once again **fully participate in the community of faith**, with God dwelling in their midst.
- **The Jubilee Year was a time**
 - to enable the marginalized to become full members of the community
 - to restore freedom and justice among people
 - to establish relationships of equality
 - to remedy the conditions that kept people oppressed
 - to build a community of justice, mercy, peace and love.
- **And that's what I believe the Episcopal Church has been doing over the past 40 years:**
 - We are attempting to make right a great wrong
 - To bring those LGBTQ people who have been marginalized for so long into the community as full members of the community
 - This has taken the Episcopal Church almost a complete Jubilee Cycle, 40 years thus far, and it may take the complete Jubilee Cycle of 49 years before this message is fully adopted by all the dioceses of the Episcopal Church.
- **Presiding Bishop Michael Curry had this to say**¹ about what went on in the Primates Meeting.
 - He said this “is not the end of the road. We have more work of love to do.”
 - And that work of love is helping our story and the story of many faithful Christians —who may be Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered—helping their story to be told and heard.
 - “and it may be,” he said, “part of our vocation in the Episcopal Church to bear witness to that.”

Righting a
Great
Wrong

¹<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/ens/2016/01/15/video-presiding-bishop-responds-to-primates-actions-stresses-relationships/>