

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Rev. Robert G. Eaton, Interim Rector
All Saints' Episcopal Church, San Diego, CA

Amos provided the vision from the Holy Spirit, that there is a plumb line to which we shall all have our up-right-ness in God measured. Until that day comes we are to find the foundational goal of our purpose in existence here in this parish, and in ministry to the world around us, that will allow us to work side by side, sent by Jesus in his name.

O Lord our God, let thy word only be spoken, and thy word only heard. Amen.

As of Friday afternoon, the Episcopal Church's General Convention has closed its business until three years from now. You were asked to pray during the nine days, and thus join hundreds --- I can only hope thousands --- of others praying daily for a holy and dominion-of-God result. Speaking of prayer for others, I've had the honor of praying for lots of people who needed physical healing, and many times I have heard from those folks after they had risen from their sick bed, and now standing up, getting around, looking better. And they are grateful for the work of prayer lifting them up to the Lord God for healing. "Thank you for praying for me, I'm doing so much better." Sometimes just to test how they are really feeling, I'll respond by saying, "Well, good. Then I guess I can stop praying for you now." I can't remember a time when in reply they haven't said, "Oh, no! Don't stop praying now!" And then some reply that betrays their self-assessment, "I need all the prayer I can get!"

Well, most every person who had been posting their daily evaluations and assessments from General Convention also included their request that we would keep praying for them each day. And now that they are done, most have posted a final blog which has included deep thanks for all those intercessors out there, most of whom they have never met, AND, they have beseeched us not to stop, but to continue our prayers AFTER Convention, as there is much that has yet to be understood and implemented.

So, on behalf of all those for whom you were praying, whether they knew it or not, thank you. And please keep the church, the Dioceses and their congregations, in your ongoing prayers.

When we are praying for something or someone by ourselves, we get to pray for just about anything we want to without having to worry about what somebody else might be praying. It's quite possible, you know, for two people to be praying for the same situation and asking God for quite different results. For instance, that old anecdote from the English civil war with bonnie prince Charlie on one hill overlooking the battlefield plain, and Oliver Cromwell and Lord Fairfax on a hilltop over on the other side of the battlefield, and both using a prayer from the same prayer book asking God to give them victory. You can imagine the tenseness and difficulty of praying if both of them had been standing together, holding hands and praying the

July 15, 2018

same prayer, each knowing that the other is praying for God's answer to be favoring them and their army.

I have no doubt that people praying for the various topics and resolutions at General Convention were often praying and looking for completely different results. And I'm quite sure, given the volatility that often presents itself at General Convention, that if people on different sides of an issue were in the same prayer circles and voiced aloud their hoped-for results there would be the breaking of hands, and perhaps words, and separation. It is so much easier if we can choose our own prayer partners based on social and political affinity, and then get on to praying for things presuming the other persons are already agreeing.

And that is what happens everywhere, nowhere being safe from the downside of diversity, including right here in our own parish of All Saints'.

I can think of many conferences, seminars and conventions I've been to where the participants have been invited to divide into small groups to have deeper discussion about a conference subject. For me, the manner of dividing which was the most fearful and yet the most fun to watch is when the entire group was asked to count, like one to ten, around the room until everyone had their number. It's fun to watch the counting process going around the room, but it is fearful to realize that some of those who have counted off your same number you really would rather not be in a group with them at all! But, you dutifully followed your instructions, found your group, and then have your discussion. Maybe you just wouldn't look at 'em.

I wonder what it was like for the disciples when Jesus sent them out two by two. Yes, they had been chosen specifically by Jesus to be a part of the 12, and yes, they were all following Jesus. But they had had squabbles already by this time. So perhaps they already identified their little affinity groups as they were going along. You remember Jesus saying, hey, what are you guys arguing about? And then Jesus would break out in song, "If you wanna be great in God's kingdom, learn to be the servant of all" and then the rest of the guys took offense at them. It never ends.

You remember what happened in last week's gospel when Jesus went to Nazareth and he was unable to do any great deeds of power there. They saw all that. And now, as Jesus decided to move on, they have to be wondering themselves what his next move would be. The next thing they know he's telling them that THEY are going to be doing ministry which will be successful and yet full of rejection just like happened to him. This is a new step in ministry strategy to send THEM out two by two. And that strategy continues. That was probably a surprise to them, and there was no sense in them to try and buddy up before Jesus sent them out.

The scriptures show that they accepted the appointments and went out. Think about it, though. One of those guys was going to get paired up with Judas it was still a little early on before that betrayal played out, so maybe it was ok. But besides the ability to put yourself into such a pairing up and having to go do something with somebody else you might not have

July 15, 2018

otherwise chosen yourself, what would have been the thing that made it work, I mean, working in tandem for ministry?

Well, don't you think that, at the least, Jesus was the focus and strength of their unity. The bible story tells us that it was Jesus who did the sending, so if Jesus, their personal focus, tells you to go work doing what he wants you to do, no matter who the other person is, you are going to go do it looking to honor Jesus. I think we can say that Jesus knew what he was doing, himself believing they COULD work together.

And we know they came back rejoicing, having seen their collaborative work successful, relying upon the authority and power of Jesus, and seeing demons flee and people healed, and the word of God proclaimed.

This alone should tell you how important it is that whenever any of us agree to be in ministry that we also agree that the power and authority and the purpose and the Glory will all be given from and to Jesus Christ through his holy spirit. You know that in order to be successful in the Church we have to lay down our own agendas, which is another way of saying to pick up our own cross, and follow Jesus together. There can be no deviation from that first order of things...God's will not ours. unless, of course, you don't want Jesus' church to be successful.

Turning back to General Convention again, I think I saw during the nine days of convention at least three different moments when it seemed that God's purposes were going to be thwarted, due to the very intentional cross purposes of others and other groups. But something different happened that was somewhat unexpected and it grabbed the attention of enough people to garner their support and find a mutually agreeable action. And at least in two of those situations it was very clear that power and prejudice were the operating problems, obviously expressions of somebody's sinful cross purposes, until stark reality brought the church together to bring Glory to God.

At this point I'm convinced that it was prayer; if prayers were not being offered for General Convention to be the real live Jesus Movement, those turns of events would most likely never have happened, and we would all be the more impoverished, and the more separated one from another as a result.

Paul said in his writing to the Ephesians, as heard read today, In Christ we have obtained an inheritance so that we might live for the praise of his glory. What a travesty to have obtained the inheritance of the Kingdom of God if we do the opposite of living for the praise of his glory, by living for our own praise and our own glory.

So often the church is thwarted by such simple sin, like presumptuousness, and personal power plays. And General Conventions have seen some of the worst at times. But Let's not be too hasty to make sure there is no log in our own eye. Congregations looking for a new rector often find exhibited the same things. As I have shared with a few people here at All Saints', part of the experience for my wife Angela interviewing as we have had opportunity at various places

July 15, 2018

over the years, we have found ourselves face to face – like even IN our face – with presumptuousness, arrogance, power plays to let us know we should just go home, and the like – and these were in situations where we thought we were otherwise all on the same page theologically, biblically, ecclesiologically etc.

You know what those folks in those situations didn't do? They didn't hold up the plumb line of God next to themselves to measure God's rightness and their warped measure. They presumed that there was no need to measure. And they would have been deeply offended if someone had said, "do you think you are right with God on this?" If anybody was not straight up and down with them, it's because THEY weren't right with God. God help us.

I haven't heard but one of his stories, but when Dr. Ed Heck went to his reunion at the University and seminary of the South last month, he heard plenty of war stories of Rector Searches Gone Bad. Those are scary to hear when you is in one yourself!

Then, Let's make sure we are praying for God's will to be done here at All Saints'; let's make sure we pick up the right attitude of service in Christ, give praise and thanksgiving for who we are in Christ, and make EVERY endeavor to look for and pray for God's will here without letting our potentially subversive ways get in the way. We thus endeavor to bring our prayers with praise and thanksgiving first of all because he has been willing to call each of us to be his disciples, and then to make sure that every action and every word is meant for his glory not for my pleasure. It is ok to have our own beliefs; the proof of giving Glory to God in it all will be the sharing, and for the bonding, and to be able to actually hold our views and each other's hand in our own parish circle of prayer.

Let us be at the work of prayer and praise.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

July 15, 2018