

The Bishop's Charge to the 169<sup>th</sup> Synod of the Diocese of Huron

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

May Fifteenth 2011

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! (Romans 1.7)

Authentic faith begins with an AMEN given in response to God's gracious and loving invitation to be in relationship. When the AMEN is given, one is compelled to make a journey into community. You see, the AMEN to God must be lived out in the context of the family of faith. And it is lives lived in the community of faith that enables God's People to be participants in God's Mission in God's world.

Recall the words from the Prophet Isaiah read just a bit ago:

“Therefore the Lord wants to be gracious to you  
Therefore he will rise up to show mercy to you  
For the Lord is a God of justice  
Blessed are those who wait for him.” (Isaiah 30.18)

And :

“And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left,  
your ears shall hear a word behind you saying,  
‘This is the way, walk in it’” (Is 30.21)

When you hear ‘this is the way, walk in it’; this is the moment for the AMEN and when given, life is transformed into the graciousness and will of God. The astonishing journey begins.

Peter and the first Christians experienced such a journey of amen and transformation: a journey that was personal first, then corporate and subsequently missional. We now find ourselves in the midst of the Great Fifty Days when God's People in Christ are called to walk right alongside our forbearers as they move through their transformation from death to life, from Good Friday to Easter. We are challenged to do this each year so that we might be refreshed and refocused as God's People. In a sense it's a matter of re-booting the AMEN!

To embark upon such journey with our forbearers will bring with it a full range of emotion and feeling. How can one fail to feel the exhilaration of parade Sunday, when embedded within the crowd, we too spread our cloaks on the road and wave our leafy branches cut from the field? Caught up in the excitement we too sing: “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” In the joy of that moment, they (and we) think we get it. They (and we) think it is possible to know the mind of God: to anticipate how God is going to act to bring about our life and salvation. But not so fast, God is a God of great and unexpected surprise. To emphasize that point, think of the father's,

encompassing, radical and compassionate love for his two undeserving sons in the parable proclaimed as gospel this evening.

Now back to the surprises of Holy Week...

Thursday brings an odd reworking of a sacred meal,  
then betrayal, abandonment, and the descent into darkness.

Friday is the day of cross, death, despair and hopelessness.

Saturday is simply vacant nothingness.

Sunday is the day when the Grace of God astonishes creation! It begins early in the morning with Mary weeping by the tomb but quickly moves to her Easter moment: "Mary! said Jesus. "Rabbouni!" , she replies. Then she runs to her community to make her breathless Easter proclamation: "I have seen the Lord". Later that evening, the fearful and locked-away disciples experience their Easter moment: "We have seen the Lord," they tell Thomas. A bit later, Thomas himself has a life-transforming opportunity to give his AMEN to the holy invitation when he proclaims, "My Lord and my God!" And in one of the neatest of the Easter moments, the Emmaus road travelers recognize Jesus in the breaking of bread and in scripture study. "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, they muse?" And who could ever forget that early morning scene by the waters of Galilee when Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel and the rest who don't know what to do so they simply go fishing. It is in this everyday occurrence (fish-fire-breakfast) that they see in a new way. It is not about being self-sufficient, inward and isolated but something much more. Jesus is pushing Peter to become missional. "Simon, son of John do you love me?" "Yes Lord; you know that I love you." Then tend and feed my sheep. The Amen given to God must be personal then corporate so that we may become missional.

It is no wonder that the church sings part of Psalm 118 in an attempt to capture God's initiative in Easter:

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.  
This is the day that the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118.23-24)

The Easter moment, however experienced, thrust those first Christians out of their fearful tombs of defeat, despair and isolation. Gathering in Spirit-filled communities replete with joy and hope, they proclaimed God's Mission in God's World. The first church reflected the Johanine theme to 'come and see' so that one may 'go and tell'. The hymn we sang as tonight's centering hymn of praise images this theme so well:

'Go and tell others, Christ is alive.'  
Love is eternal, faith and hope thrive.  
What God intended, Jesus fulfilled;  
what God conceives can never be killed.

The first Easter community sang their alleluias in the midst of a threatening, unfriendly and seriously anxiety-provoking world. Yet to their everlasting credit, a retreat to the pre-Easter tombs of fear, despair and hopelessness was never an option. In Christ, they journeyed fearlessly into the vortex of the unknown future and simply changed the world! They took with them no sense of entitlement, no buildings, no fat bank accounts and very few people. They journeyed with three critical things: faith, community and Holy Spirit.

Astonishingly, here we find ourselves some 2000 years later peering into a similar vortex of an unknown future. In response, today's church, at its very best, continues to sing the song of our forbearers: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. At our best we too know that we need three things for the journey ahead: faith, community and Holy Spirit. This is all we need to love the world according to God's purpose.

We gather in worship this evening as the 169<sup>th</sup> Synod of the Diocese of Huron. We come to the Lord's Table in this historic Cathedral bringing with us our AMEN to Jesus Christ. We come together in community to see what God has in mind for God's Church. We do this so that we may leave Synod to go and tell. We do this, not as a people bereft of resources and abilities but as God's people "each given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift." (Eph. 4.7)

So Synod, what shall we see this next while?

- See Canon Bill Cliff play with Synod's theme of Astonished by Grace as he 'breaks open' Holy Writ for us. ("Were not our hearts burning within us while he was opening the scriptures to us?") – Luke 21.32
- Watch Social Justice Huron, and the Huron Hunger Fund Ministry invite us to focus on the Fourth Mark of Mission as we seek to transform unjust structures of society.
- We welcome Richard Salt to synod in his new role as Director for Mission and Ministry. Working with the Diocesan leadership team, Richard is gifted beyond measure to help the Diocesan community move faithfully into the future that awaits us. It is a journey to be made if we are to be God's missional people. Richard brings faith, vision, passion and commitment to the task and for that we profoundly thank him.
- Watch Holy Spirit once again dance with Huron Youth both within this assembly and beyond. Be assured that Youth Synod, Youth Conference, CLAY, SOCKs (Anglican Lutheran Stewards of Creation) and Huron Church Camp are all signs that God's Holy Spirit is swirling about! And if you don't know what that means just ask someone younger than you.
- And have the eyes to see the prophetic voice of the EnviroAction Ministry Group gently yet persistently challenging God's People to be transformed by the fifth Mark of Mission: to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.
- Synod, can you see God's purpose reflected in the journey to self-determination, peace and reconciliation for Indigenous Anglican Christians? Do we really walk in solidarity with our sisters and brothers? Can we see God's hand at work in the

- ministries of Bishop Mark MacDonald, Huron's Aboriginal Council (LAIC), in the National Sacred Circle gatherings as well as the Anglican Council of Aboriginal Peoples (ACIP)? (Much has been achieved, but much more awaits.)
- And can you see Holy Spirit swirling about the Back to Church Initiative in which the family of Huron has been invited to participate? You and I will be challenged to claim our Christian voice and fully embrace the First Mark of Mission: to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. It all starts there.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, we are called by God to bring our AMEN into the midst of this sacred gathering. We have come into community so that we may be attuned to the astonishing things God has in mind for God's Church. And strengthened by AMEN, Community and Holy Spirit, we are to leave Synod to boldly go and tell of God's Love in Jesus Christ! The last stanza of our Communion hymn nails it for me. Remember to pray this as we sing it:

My heart is filled with thankfulness  
To Him who reigns above  
Whose wisdom is my perfect peace  
Whose every thought is love  
For every day I have on earth  
Is given by the King  
So I will give my life my all  
To love and follow Him

God's love- God's people-God's Mission-God's world!

May God bless us as we gather together in 'Christ' this next while.

-in God's name  
-and for God's Glory

AMEN