

Homily, St. Andrew's
Sunday, September 7, 2014
Exodus 12:1-14; Romans 13:8-14

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

In my first semester of seminary, retired Bishop Jim Cruickshank was my professor for "denominational studies." Late this summer, I found myself thinking about him and that class as I ruminated on various questions and other feedback I've heard in my first few months here. I ended up going back to my class notes to refresh my memory about what he taught us and found a very helpful summary of his basic thesis. Bishop Jim told us that in the 40 years he had been ordained, from 1962 to 2002, there had been more change in the church than in the previous 400 years! He said that the Anglican Church, shaped by both Protestant and Catholic theologies and practices, had been relatively steady for about 400 years... and then came the 1960's. With the 1960's came 6 worldwide movements of the Holy Spirit that have shaken the foundations of the Christian church. The movements were ecumenical, Biblical, liturgical, lay, charismatic and in peace with justice.

Bishop Jim also described 4 stages of change. At first, new ideas are ridiculed, then rigorously opposed, eventually accepted and finally taken as self-evident. The challenge comes in that change occurs at different rates in different places because of all kinds of factors. The 2 factors that probably matter the most with me coming here as your parish priest are that I wasn't born until the 1960's were already over and many of the changes of those 6 movements of the Spirit were well underway, and the Anglican parish I grew up in here in Calgary was one that embraced many of them relatively early on. This means that ideas and practices that are self-evident to me, because it's always been that way, may not be so for some individuals and in the culture here at St. Andrew's.

For instance, who should rightly read the Gospel during worship? Up until the 1960's, the role of the priest was to do everything in the service. Historically this is partly because the priest was often the only literate person in the community but it also has to do with a view of the priest as the chaplain to the Anglicans and the one responsible for all the caring. But then came along the Biblical movement of the Spirit that meant an explosion of critical biblical study and shifts in what we believe about the Bible in general. Perhaps more importantly were the liturgical and lay movements of the Spirit that introduced much more lay participation broadly throughout the church. In the church today, ministry is understood to be the responsibility of the whole people of God and that is reflected in our worship by significant lay involvement. To me it has always been that way, and so not having lay participation in worship would never be a consideration.

I have so appreciated returning to my notes about the understanding of one parish priest turned bishop who lived through and has reflected on the many and profound changes of the past 50-odd years. And it turns out that the shifts Bp Jim talked about have also been noticed by others in a myriad of ways. About 6 years ago, academic, author and publisher Phyllis Tickle published a book titled *The Great Emergence* that lays out what Bp Jim taught in a more researched, sociological and popular way. Her basic thesis is that roughly every 500 years, the church goes through a major transformation. The first part of the book that some of you have read describes, or at least mentions, the changes that came with King David, with the Babylonian exile, with Jesus, with Gregory the Great, with the Great Schism and finally with the Great

Reformation. [How's that for a one-sentence romp through more than 3000 years of history?!?] And then as her introduction to the basic idea nears its end, Tickle writes:

“When Christians despair of the upheavals and re-formations that have been the history of our faith - when the the faithful resist, as so many do just now, the presence of another time of reconfiguration with its inevitable pain - we all would do well to remember that, not only are we in the hinge of a five-hundred-year period, but we are also the direct product of one. We need, as well, to gauge our pain against the patterns and gains of each of the previous hinge times through which we have already passed. It is especially important to remember that no standing form of organized Christian faith has ever been destroyed by one of our semi-millennial eruptions. Instead, each simply has lost hegemony or pride of place to the new and not-yet-organized form that was birthing.” (Tickle, 27)

There are several points in this quote that I think are so important for us to hold onto. The first and perhaps the most critical, is the opening sentence: “when Christians despair...” Change is loss. For me, many of the changes of the past 50 years are self-evident and so it can be hard to understand the depth of loss and the grief that has come with them. And yet many good and faithful church-folk live with it all the time. I know there is significant loss, perhaps the most poignant of which is when children and grand-children, whether biologically ours or not, seem to have abandoned or rejected a church, a religion and a tradition that we hold dear. It is a reality that from the 1960's to today, the generations of the Baby Boomers on down have left mainline churches in droves. I recently had a parishioner ask me about plans to reach out to younger generations because she would like to try to get her adult children back to church. She didn't say “before I die,” but it hung in the air. I can't say or predict whether or not anything we do will have that result but I am committed to trying and failing and trying again, to find a way of bringing our beloved Anglican way of being Christian to younger generations.

Tickle also reminds us that we are the direct product of earlier hinge times in history. That is the basic idea behind our program this fall of exploring the vitality and diversity of our Anglican tradition, beginning with the Great Reformation. We aren't “starting with Jesus” because our start with Jesus is assumed. Instead we want to consider more specifics about the journey of the past 500 years and how particular moments, beliefs, practices and reforms have shaped who we are today. Starting next week, we will imaginatively return to the early 16th century and reflect on the politics, religion, worship, theology and spirituality that developed over the course of that century and the next. As we get into October and November, we will move into the next couple of centuries and return to reflecting on the 20th century and the past 50-odd years in 2015.

Our journey will be marked by focusing on a few particular people along the way to see how their life and work continues to influence us today. Beginning on page 15 of the BAS you'll see our calendar of saints. The national church has also compiled a book of prayers and readings called “For All the Saints” from which we will draw resources in the weeks to come.

I realized after I'd made the list that all the people we are focusing on are boys. It's unfortunate, but it is just the way it is. There are, of course, holy women throughout Christian tradition who are acknowledged as divines and teachers but none of them, except for Queen Elizabeth, are in the direct path of Anglican tradition. It just is.

I also want to acknowledge that we are taking liberties with the calendar as we won't be celebrating these folks on their assigned days. I'm pointing that out partly to show one of the principles of the current times that Tickle refers to that is expressed well by Diana Butler-Bass in her book *Christianity For the Rest of Us* from 2006. It is that “tradition has become a positive

term... [understood] as a fluid, dynamic, and critical process... [Not] a museum piece to be guarded; rather... the clay of Christian experience - material that successive generations of believers must craft with faithful care.” (47) My approach and belief is that we stand in the flow of Anglican Christian experience and that along with those we honour and celebrate, we too can and must craft our tradition with faithful care. It is how we honour the legacy so many incredible Anglicans have left in our care, and how we pass that tradition on to others who will come after us.

Today and for the next several weeks, our biblical ancestors will accompany us as we hear important moments in the story of their escape from Egypt, and journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. I encourage you to consider how that story can help us understand our own.

Finally, let’s hear again Paul’s great encouragement to us to pay attention to time, as he wrote: “... you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near.” Every passing day, salvation is nearer to us than days past... the night is far gone, the day is near. This is our hope; this is our faith. And so let us lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light, trusting in God’s guidance and in the comfort, strength and courage of the Holy Spirit as we remember the past, live in the present and hope for the future.