

Sermon for AGO October 12th 2004

I speak to you in the name of the God who creates us, Jesus his Son who redeems us and the Holy Spirit who empowers us.

Next Monday the long-awaited report from the Eames Commission will be released. Rumour says that the Episcopal Church of the USA and the Diocese of New Westminster will be reprimanded at the least and possibly stronger measures will be recommended.

This report commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, is another effort to try and hold together a church that does not have a common and sturdy foundation.

This has not always been the case; until approximately 150 years ago the Worldwide Anglican Communion was united in its view of Scripture, the 39 articles and the Solemn Declaration.

These 3 had a more binding effect internationally than we probably realize. Our Book of Common Prayer also meant that there was uniformity to worship even though the languages were vastly different.

Our history as an Anglican Church has been a very interesting and colourful one.

As a strength we have always had a remarkable capacity to hold very divergent views under one roof.

But it has been a weakness too, because of our diversity we have not been able to produce a deeply uniting and homogeneous theology

Our ability to hold such widely divergent views under one roof has contributed enormously to our present crisis;

We have had no statement of belief such as some Reform Churches require a new member to sign.

Today we say, if you want to know who an Anglican is and what he/she believes come and see what we do on Sunday.

The point on which such a directive founders is that what we do and say are not necessarily what we all believe.

For example I know people who refuse to say the creed or omit the parts of it they do not believe.

So what has long existed but has become increasingly apparent over the past 5-10 years is that not only are we NOT united on the fundamentals of the faith but in effect we are two churches under one roof.

And right now the roof is leaking and threatens to break apart.

The core difference in the two churches is Scripture.

We are **not** here tonight because we have some hideous disregard for people who are gay.

We are not here because we want to whine, complain and huddle in some dark corner trying to keep things the way they always were.

We are here because our understanding of Scripture differs vastly from those who call themselves liberal.

Those, like us, who would describe themselves as Orthodox believe the Bible is the Word of God, God-given, God-inspired, written by human agency under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore we cannot and must not tamper with it.

We believe that:

- i) Scripture contains everything we need to know to access God's salvation and gain eternal life;
- ii) Scripture is where we discover our salvation history, God's commandments and how they should govern our behavior; we do not alter them to something we might prefer.
- iii) Scripture is where we discover the incredible love of God for us shown in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

On June 10th of this year the ACC showed the world, by a majority vote, that our church is no longer governed by Scripture.

I was present in the Essentials Centre at General Synod that day when the orthodox delegates returned from the floor of Synod immediately after the vote.

The enormity of what the Synod had so blithely done, was brought home to me with deep impact when some of those delegates fell to the floor of the chapel wailing in grief.

Spontaneously a service of repentance began, where those present cried out to the Lord for forgiveness, that our church could have, by a simple vote, turned its back on its Scriptural foundation and on 2,000 years of belief.

Obviously this is an enormous problem and we have to address this head-on. What lies before us is huge.

We have never faced anything of this magnitude in our lifetime.
Other issues pale by comparison to what we now face.
The Anglican Church of Canada and the World-wide Anglican Communion
will never be the same again.
Because it would seem that unless there is a movement of radical repentance
a split is inevitable.

Let me make it quite clear.

No one wants a split.

But neither can these two branches of Anglicanism continue to co-exist.
The fundamental difference is now too great.

We do not know what lies ahead. We don't know what the report will say
and how the various parts of the WW church will react.

Should a split come, we neither know when it might happen, how or in what
manner it will address the important points. But please understand that those
who hold the orthodox view will be staying with the World-Wide Anglican
Communion, the vast majority of whom are also orthodox.

The breakaway factions include the ECUSA and ACC and parts of the
Church of England.

On a national level, the Essentials movement has been laboring for a decade
to uphold traditional and orthodox faith and now this movement has come
into its own and is assuming the leadership across the country for what lies
ahead.

The AGO, Anglican Gathering of Ottawa, is a local response to the crisis
and is not specifically affiliated with Essentials.

And for what lies ahead we need to do some serious preparation.

If you were planning to climb in the foothills of the Himalayas you would
need to prepare yourself very intentionally and in a number of ways.

1. You would undertake a rigorous physical training.
2. You would purchase all the necessary and highly specialized
equipment.

3. You would prepare your body properly in anticipation of this huge output of energy and endurance

There is a distinct parallel between the characteristics of undertaking an expedition such as I have just described and where we, the AGO and our fellow-orthodox people across the country are in our faith journey today.

We are a disparate group not yet fashioned into any kind of team ready for major exertion. While we may be united in our opposition to the road the ACC is taking, we are as different as chalk and cheese as to how we should proceed and what we are likely to create.

There is only one hope for us to come together as a cohesive team capable of moving forward and that is our unity in Jesus.

And we are deeply united on Scripture as the Word of God; Not something to be tampered with and altered to suit the times.

We will differ on the place of Word and Sacrament, on the ordination of women, in our preferences for music and worship styles, in our modes of prayer, but these are all secondary, and are NOT essential for this training to move ahead.

However when we address the externals, the way we interact and deal with those with whom we are in disagreement then we had better go into training to present the best possible face to a very antagonistic world.

A few suggestions for you to consider:

1 Have Grace in all dealings. If you cannot speak in gracious way, even when being firm then, don't speak. We are **all** judged by how each individual one of us behaves.

2. Be Wise in all you say. Don't persist where there is no fertile ground. Don't bash, beat anyone with whom you are in disagreement on this issue. It is the Lord's job to bring that person to him and He may or may not choose you as an agent of conversion.

3. **Do not run away** from or neglect the opportunities that are given to you to share the Gospel. Become braver and bolder, we need these characteristics more today than ever in our lives.

4. **Have joy, be joyful.** One of the most attractive and best selling qualities in the Essentials of Canada is the radiant joy of the two leaders. I have never seen Charlie Masters or George Sinclair look anything but joyful and they have been through tough times.

5 **And pray, pray, pray** for this is the Lord's battle. And we need his Holy Spirit, his courage and his guidance, every single day of our lives.

6. **Finally, be strong in the Lord** and in the strength of his power. And the peace of God will be with you. Amen