

26 Pentecost
Proper 28
Nov. 13, 2005

For the People of St. Philip's

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18
Psalm 90:1-8, 12
1 Thessalonians 5: 1-10
Matthew 25: 14-15, 19-29

In the past few days, a few of us from the parish, -clergy and elected parish delegates- joined over 400 delegates at the WNC diocesan convention at Kanuga. This year's theme was "One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism. This was my first convention in WNC. It was a joy for me to join this family, this well-functioning, healthy family for a few days. Bishop Gayle Harris of Mass. joined us along with our bishop Porter Taylor in prayerfully discerning what we are called to do in our ministries as baptized Christians, seeking through resolutions, prayer and dialogue to form a vision for our Christian mission in this community and beyond.

Unity was the mission of this convention. Though One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.

I had a real sense as I sat and watched the convention that we stand united as stewards of a vast treasure. A treasure, not just of income and expenses, not just in the talents possessed by those in attendance. All 400 souls. But we saw glimpse of the talents given to the global communion of saints

At the convention we never called the question as to who had the most or least talent, It was clear to me, in all dialogue, that we were challenged to stand united in order to risk releasing what we have for the benefit of God's People.

At the end of time, our good works will not save us. Nor will our number of talents save us.

What saves us is God's promise that through the love of Christ we are freed from fear. We don't have to hide from a harsh god. What saves us is our readiness to let go of what we are given, to risk loss, in order to be received into the joy of our Master, Our Creator. Just as Jesus Christ gave up his life on the Cross for us, freely given, Christ's love unites us. One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.

We have a Creator who knows. Our Creator who says to us, "oh you thought YOU knew did you? You knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not scatter? You knew that did you?" Hmmm. Jesus in this parable just might not be talking about money. That's good news isn't it? we're all a bit tired of talking about money.

Our conversation with God is always about the end of time. The end is near, we hear. The Son of Man is coming, keep watch. Keep the lamps burning bright. Do not fall asleep.. Just as we labor in birth with pains that we cannot control, we also labor near toward an end that we do not control. These pains come on suddenly, they are not the end, they point toward the new life which awaits. .

We cannot afford to hide our meager talent in a hole somewhere, there's not time.. It will not grow there. We can't afford to box up and hold onto the treasures of our Church. There's not time. It will not grow there.

Do not store up treasures for yourself on earth, where moths and worms destroy them and thieves can break in and steal . But store up treasure for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor worm destroy them and thieves cannot break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. ((Matthew 6:19-21)

As Bp Taylor shared with our diocesan convention delegates in his sermon on Thursday evening,
” Jesus’ love for us enables us to do love for all of God’s children.

When we open our hearts to Jesus, we open our hearts---period.
And we open our lives.
And we and the world are never the same.”

Global Missions is a focus for this diocese.. This is intentional. A church that is focused on the mission of caring for the poor and seeking Christ in all persons is a church that is freed from divisions.

Yes at convention we had resolutions to ponder. Yes, we had program reports. Yes, we prayed and laughed and sang. But we as Christians must also be sober, watchful. We must never forget that we are aliens in this world, we are resident aliens called out into the mission field . We are called to go out into the world in peace, to love and serve our Lord..

The Anglican Communion estimates that it has 77 million members in 38 self-governing churches in 164 countries . All Episcopalians, by virtue of their baptism and therefore members of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society are called to share in God’s mission.

As members of this global communion we are called to pray for the worldwide mission of our church. There is an Anglican cycle of prayer that helps us to remember these missions in our daily prayers. Copies are available in the church office.

We are called to become more educated about mission-minded efforts within our church, our diocese and our parish. We have a vast resource of committed missionaries within this parish and diocese who can educate us. We are called to act. Of the several diocesan mission projects that were highlighted at this week’s convention, it was evident that St. Philip’s parishioners are out there in the mission field, putting prayer into action, using and growing their talents with great interest. Parishioners of St. Philip’s are also actively involved in changing the lives of our neighbors nearby who suffer from poverty and neglect, Parishioners of St. Philip’s love and serve Christ by ministering to the youngest and oldest amongst us.

The diocese of WNC is exploring the possibility of starting a companion diocese relationship with the diocese of Durgapur Church of North India. In January Bp Taylor will be leading a delegation to begin exploring whether our diocese and our fellow Christians in Durgapur are called to be companions in Christ’s ministry to bring light to the world. Our neighbors in India are keeping watch on the other side of the world, they look for us to join them.

Here is what the diocese of Durgapur desires to do in the coming years.

“The church today should become a strong voice for the poor of the world, especially in developing countries. Church (united) should fight common enemies of humanity: materialism, violence, global injustice that promotes consumerism and excludes the poor from the table of Life. We must assume our responsibility to care for the poor, neglected, and the exploited.”

This isn’t just another charity asking for our treasures, this is about our Life. This is about living an Abundant life

free from fear as we approach God's judgment at the end of time. . If we hold onto what is not ours, in the end we will have nothing. As our psalm this morning says, In the morning it is green and flourishes, in the evening it is dried up and withered. In the end, if we hold onto what is not ours, we will have nothing..

By risking the release of our talents into our own neighborhoods and into the world, we are trusting in God's abundance. We are trusting God's loving promise to multiply the Gifts which have been so freely given to us. In THIS multitude of gifts which spring from our collective and individual release, so much more will be given.

And at the end of time, having joined in increasing the fruits of the Kingdom, we will enter into the joy of our Creator, we will fully enter into the joy of Creation.

as a church, as a diocese, as a parish , if WE keep our mission focused on growing the light of Christ in the world, more will be given. We will be ONE with God through our Lord, our Faith, our Baptism..