

Trinity 21, 2017
The Fine Lines of Reality
Ordination to the Priesthood
St. Andrew's Anglican Church
By Fr. Bill Baker

What a blessed couple of days we spent together last week. I first want to thank everyone of you for the incredible support you have given to Chris and Myself over the last 14 years we have spent with you here at St. Andrews. You are completely unaware of how often, as I stood talking with you at so many coffee hours, that my inner voice was thanking God that you are part of my life. No matter what chapter you came into my journey you are part of my foundation.

Starting as a parishioner, I had no idea what the Lord had in mind for me. My most vivid remembrance of that first service Andrea and I attended was the intense awareness that something big was going to happen for us in this church. Some of you may recall my pre-diaconal sermon I gave 4 years ago, where I sought the Lord for the direction of my ministry, a calling that came through loud and clear with the passing of our daughter Marie. It is not important today to cover those aspects, but to say that in the end the foundation of my ministry was established then and remains today...the unending love of God found on the Cross.

In Bishop Grundorf's address last week, the charge for Chris and myself to speak boldly the word of God does not lay lightly in our hearts. And we are reminded once again on this day the importance of standing firm in the Gospel of Christ by Paul's words to the Ephesians, *"...And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel."* Words aptly heard on the 21st Sunday in Trinity...one week after our ordinations.

Chris and I were asked to write about our journeys, our experiences that have gotten us to this point...ordination to the Priesthood. I began by thinking about the sacrifices, not just my own, but of my family and of all of you. Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 17 that *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."*

I have found that in denying myself of my selfish desires that I have gained so much more than I could have ever imagined.

And in chapter 10 we read words that are difficult to comprehend for those who do not understand; Jesus says, *“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”* I tell you the truth...there is nothing that should be allowed to penetrate your heart so fully as to come between you and your family...except for the love of Christ. My whole ministry is built on this foundation of love because I have realized that my love is imperfect, my love is judgmental. It is only through the perfect love of Christ within me that I can truly love the sin-sick of this world.

So, what about my journey? It is a difficult thing to say, but with all the pressure and expectations of ministry I feel unworthy. As I sat down to write as I was instructed, many thoughts came into my mind, but my fingers began to move across the keyboard in a different pattern than I had intended. And so, I have not written so much as to my journey as I have on the affects of my journey. So, I ask for your indulgence as I expound on that which resides within me, that which will expose the continuing love of God and his freedom to use me.

A few nights past, Chris and I met out at the church, as we have done several times lately. On this particular night, as we stood together at the altar, Chris's phone rings...its Fr. Robert...how perfect. We have a great conversation about our upcoming ordinations and at the end Fr. Robert says something that struck me to the core, “Gentlemen”, he says, “enjoy these final moments as deacons...after you are ordained to the priesthood your lives will never be the same.” If Fr. Robert would have been here in person he could have achieved the same result by kicking me in the stomach. This is serious business and I feel the commitment! With thoughts of burdens and thoughts of joys intermixed, I closed my eyes for a good nights rest...or so I thought. My wife will tell you that I do too much work in my sleep. Sometimes bouncing out of bed at 2:00 or 3:00 am because a stray brain cell just caught fire igniting an understanding that I had not seen before. That night, after Fr. Roberts call was one of those work nights. I had a dream...

In my dream I awoke sitting in my van in a store parking lot. I was suppose to be going to work at the Medford Winco, but the parking lot I found myself in was at the Rays Market in Central Point. I was confused; what time was it? Was I late? How do I get to Winco? As I get out of my Vehicle I hit a woman with the door as she rode by on her bike. There was no reaction...she just continued on her way. Next I find myself desperately trying to find a way to get to work on time. I see a bike, jump on and begin to ride through the parking lot. But, I notice that it is hard to ride...the ground...its covered in snow. Everyone are riding bikes, slipping and falling. This is ridiculous I think to myself and then I realize that I have just stolen a bike and so I return to the parking lot and put the bike back. I am loosing my mind, something is wrong, I can't think straight...and were is my van? In my confusion a kind young man comes to my aid and walks me around the parking lot. No avail...no van. As dreams go I next find myself in a hallway of offices trying to get someone's attention. I am sick, I need help...nothing is making sense. A woman comes by and I reach out telling her that I cannot work today, something is wrong and I need to see a doctor! She wrinkles her nose at me as says "your not sick." I find the boss of this place and tell him that something is terribly wrong...I need to see neurologist, I think I need brain surgery. Everything is out of whack! This is not how things should be.

I awake from my dream with eyes wide-open, heart pounding. What was that? I continue to lie there with all these images going through my head. And then my dream begins to filter...putting all the pieces into place. Dreams are such a strange dimension. I realized when I awoke that while I was actively experiencing these things in my dream state, there was another part of me that was distinguishing between two realities...those in Christ and those without. With their heads down, those without Christ followed each other on vehicles not set up to handle the dangerous conditions in which they lived. For some, even hitting them boldly with the word of God would not cause them to react to the Lord's calling. Even the young man in the parking lot who seemed to come to my aid only had self-interest in mind as he was actually swinging me wildly through the parking lot with no intention of assistance. He only wanted me to forget the truth of my condition and follow the crowd.

In a world bent on its own destruction reality is much distorted from the true reality found in Christ. In my dream I thought I was going crazy, that it was me who was losing it. But the truth is that the spirit of Christ that rests within me and in you, opens us to the truth that belies the world we live in. This is where my journey has taken me: In the love that formed my foundation I have found the strength and the spirit to persist in a world lost in its ways, where I am called to look like the crazy guy amongst the lost. I too have had to fight against following the crowd, concerned with my position on matters pertaining to this life. I witness those who choose to follow their own paths trusting in their own knowledge. I see those not willing to listen to the truth of their conditions or the remedy for their pain. Crazy guy...I'll be the crazy guy; to be a light in the world where so many are disillusioned by the distortion of sin, to expose the truth of our condition to those who remain blind, to separate myself from this world while continuing to walk amongst those in need of the salvific work of Jesus Christ.

As you will recall, just a few moments ago I made the statement that in coming to St. Andrew's I felt that something big was going to happen for Andrea and I in this church. Well, you might think that last weekend's Ordination and all its celebration are what I was referring to; not exactly. It is here at St. Andrew's where I realized that Christ was able and willing to work through me, a sinner lost on his own path. It was here where I first found my desire to be in the service of our Lord, wherever that would lead. It has been a process of cleaning out the closet, dusting off the skeletons and then removing them. The journey for any Christian is never an easy path, but it is the only path that reaches its destination. My journey and yours are virtually the same; we follow the leading of the Lord, take our responsibilities seriously and are willing to be the crazy guy.

I thank you all once again for all your love and support. Answering the call to be a priest in God's church has been an humbling experience. With arms stretched out, I stand as a servant of Christ and of all God's children.

Amen.