

Trinity 24
Anglican Province of America – Synod 2018
Seeds of Faith

St. Andrew's Church – Jacksonville, Or
By Fr. Bill Baker

“We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints...” (Colossians 1:3-4).

As you are aware some of us have just arrived back from a provincial synod of the Anglican Province of America where we gathered together in a bond only made possible by the blood of Jesus Christ. We broke bread, we prayed, we worshipped at the Table of the Lord and consumed together the Real Presence of Christ with us and in us. We enjoyed worshipping together at Morning Prayer and we felt the spirit moving through us at Evensong as Fr. Dan Squires led us through a service of angelic chants as voices from a local high School Choir filled the church. And Holy Communion, celebrated in the Apostolic succession of Bishop Grundorf, can only be described as another step in the process of sanctification. It was a glorious time that has built and strengthened relationships that will continue to grow into the eternal future. But the purpose of the church does not lie solely in our experience or how we feel about our involvement and connections to it. Our coming to the Lord has always been about faith...faith in Jesus Christ.

The stage that Christ has set before us encompasses an eternal past and an eternal future of which we have been created to participate in. In our attempt to understand this mystery, we come face to face with the unfathomable love of our Father in Heaven. At the synod we were blest by a slideshow presentation put together and presented by Mary Grundorf. Our eyes were opened allowing us to witness the Holy Spirit at work in the darkest places of the world. We were taken out of our privileged way of thinking and made to understand that the Gospel, while giving hope to those who answer the call, does not always come with comfort. Persecution and extreme poverty are realities that most

of us do not fully grasp. The APA has sought out these untouchables in remote regions around the world in such places as Ecuador, Haiti, India and the Philippines. An overwhelming sense of awe captured each of us as we realized the part that our congregations play in making the Gospel available to these people. Part of the money we give to the Diocese of the West is sent to the APA where it is combined with the contributions of our sister churches. These monies culminate in a contribution able to reach places we could never touch on our own. It is truly the work of the Holy Spirit through the body of Christ reaching to the ends of the earth.

Only faith can take such a lofty effort into the lowliest of places and plant hope. Faith is the strongest of all forces and this weekend we were taken out of our comfort zones and exposed to the great depths that the Gospel must transcend to bring that faith...to all people.

Bishop Grundorf was emphatic that we, the church, are commissioned to seek the lost sheep. "The survival of the church", he said, "depends on how we come together as the body of Christ...the 'we' and 'them' language alienates where we are called to be inclusive of those who are lost." Doesn't it make sense that we of faith must step out in that faith to seek and serve the Lord? The great commission does not allow us to sit in the comfort of padded pews. There is great work to be done.

Maybe, just maybe church is too easy for us. We come and go as we please. We take a Sunday off periodically or even monthly. "I'm a Christian...I'm alright...I can pray next week." Really? Are you sure? Next week doesn't come for everyone! We have work to do...I pray that we don't become complacent in our easy lives but, that our faith drives us to share the hope we find in Christ. That is, after all, what we are called to do.

In the third verse of the Epistle of Jude we read this, "*Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith, which was once delivered unto the saints.*" Note the reference to a 'common salvation' and the action to 'contend for the faith'. Understand that there is a common salvation that is offered unto all mankind that is found only in the blood shedding of Jesus Christ, but

also understand that it does not come without contending for the faith. The Christian has work to do; to step out in that faith when called and to wait upon the Lord for the fruit to appear whenever and wherever that may be. We must all be willing to ask ourselves, "Am I willing to step out in faith and succumb to the Lord's will in ways that are outside of my normal church experience...outside of my comfort zone?"

We come to church because God calls us to come together in worship...we are suppose to be here...together. It is through our corporate prayers and commitment to the sacraments that we are strengthened, but we are not to keep our faith locked up inside ourselves. Faith cannot be saved nor stored up; it is to be shared with all people. Faith is the love of Christ whose blood flowed from the highest places of the heavens into the darkest valleys of mankind's descent.

We as a church are bound to the Gospel! We must listen and respond not letting earthly commitments hold us back from carrying out Gods call. There is a unity in our membership within the body of Christ where Baptism marks us as the sons and daughters of God. But there is also another unity that binds all mankind together regardless of faith...it is appointed unto man to die as an answer to sin. If we are to be faithful to what we confess in Christ then worship in His established church must be a priority, lives lived according to biblical values must be upheld and the work of faithfulness must be performed without expectations...we must plant the seeds and let God bring in the harvest.

Once again, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints..."

Faith in Christ and love to all the saints...this is the Christian message so precisely carried out by this church of which you belong. It is my prayer that in the days ahead we will find ourselves up to the challenge to engage the world around us as Christ calls us out.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.