

July 1, 2018

General Convention: The Church Gathering Together Seeking the Direction of God

Prayer

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

It is my custom to preach each Sunday on the proper's. The lessons that were just read. And I do that pretty consistently. But three or four times during the course of the year I vary from that because of things that are going on in the church, or in our community, or in the world. This happens to be one of those times. You see the Episcopal Church USA is about to gather together for its tri-annual convention. We meet every three years as the Episcopal Church USA. This year it's going to be held in Austin Texas. Should be nice and cool down there. (Laughter) And members of every diocese that have been elected in their diocesan conventions will be gathering, both clergy and lay. And all the bishops that are serving now and retired bishops are also invited to go and participate. This last Thursday I was at a clergy meeting in Pensacola where our Bishop Russell Kendrick was. And he encouraged us to pray for this convention that's about to start. And to ask our congregations to pray for the convention. But also, to present what's going on positively. I took that as a challenge because sometimes it's not easy to present all that goes on at convention positively.

Convention actually convenes on Thursday the 5th. Even as we speak people are flying to Austin to prepare for these meetings. It lasts about 10 days. The legislative session from the 5th through 13th. And when

Russell was talking to us about the convention and about how he wanted us to present it. Not telling us how we needed to present it but how he would like it presented. He said something that our presiding bishop Michael Curry said to the bishops that were gathered not long ago. And it was about having the message of the village presented.

Sometimes when we think of convention and we think of our national convention. We think about factions speaking about different sides of issues. Trying to legislate, not unlike our Congress, trying to legislate laws about how we are to believe or how we are to act. That is not what this convention is about. The Episcopal Church National Convention is about people gathering together seeking direction from God. It's about people who have been elected from their diocese. To represent them and to come and to present how they see God leading the church in a time of change. To make the church and to keep the church, hopefully, relevant to the people.

It's about understanding the issues that are going on within the church. Issues that are going on within our country. And issues that are going on throughout the world. That the church is called to address with the gospel of Jesus Christ. And in our best moments that is what we are trying to accomplish as the Episcopal church that gathers in our general convention.

It's about trying to live out our baptismal vows. It's about seeing what is going on and where God is leading us. And trying to follow as faithfully as we possibly can. That's the hope. That's the voice that is gathering together. It's where voices disagree but come out with an understanding that we are still searching. We are still trying to understand. We are still trying to know God more fully. And to present that God to a world that desperately needs to hear the word of God leading us forward.

And unfortunately, we can't all attend. We're all not going to be there. I do encourage you to look at some of the Episcopal church websites and such that will present the debates and such that are going on. But what you will hear because the national media thinks this is a great opportunity. When the Episcopal church gathers together. It only happens once every three years. And they are looking for the most sensational, most divisive, most controversial things that we might say or do. And that's what will be presented on the national news.

And almost always it's presented in such a way as to get a reaction. Not just from Episcopalians, but from the rest of the nation and quite possibly the rest of the world. And in times past, we have been more than happy to give them controversial things, sensational things to present to the world. And they thank us, and they love us for it.

And this year is really not going to be different because as the church gathered and trying to follow faithfully Jesus Christ in our worship. There will be discussions about prayer book revision. That makes the stomach of every true Episcopalian turn into a knot. What, they're going to change my prayer book again? I'd just like to point out that we had a 1928 prayer book. We've had some earlier ones. We have a 1979 prayer book that we are using now. It's not like we rush into these things. And it's all about trying to deal with the reality that we have in our lives. And of all of the prayer book revision that you might hear about what will be sensationalized is their talking about having a liturgy for marrying same gendered persons. I have a little secret for you we already have some trial liturgies out there for that. It's already going on. But to make it official to actually put it in our prayer book. That will be presented as something controversial and sensational that will be presented. There goes those crazy Episcopalians again. They'll marry anybody. They'll bless anybody. They'll ordain anybody. (Audience says "Amen.") Absolutely. Because we do. Because they're all God's

children. We're trying to be faithful to that. We're trying to faithful to those baptismal vows that we're all going to renew here in just a few minutes. About loving people. Honoring people. The dignity of every human being. Isn't that amazing? Isn't that what God wants?

You'll probably hear next Sunday that these crazy Episcopalians have gone to a camp where illegal aliens have crossed the border. And have a worship service there at that camp. I know this because that's going to happen. The news people will see this as an opportunity to show off those crazy liberal bleeding-heart Episcopalians that just want to sling open the doors and let anybody in, and everybody in. Well we kind of do in our church. Not necessarily in our country. But we do want them treated decently. We do want every human being to be treated decently.

So, several hundred Episcopalians are going to gather at one of these camps and they're going to have a worship service. I don't know what they're going to say about it. I can be pretty sure it won't be overly positive depending on what side of the row you're on. I have been called the token liberal for our men's breakfast group and that's pretty accurate. Most of the men's breakfast group were here at the 8:00 service and I said that and there were headings bobbing everywhere.

Truly I'm a moderate, politically. I'm pretty moderate religiously. And it's all in comparison. To some I'm pretty conservative, to some I'm very liberal. All I want is for God to say you're faithful. That's what I'm trying to do. That's what this convention is trying to do. It's trying to be faithful to the vows and promises that we have made as baptized Christians. The vows and promises that we have made as ordained ministers in the church. And the thing to remember about Episcopalians and Anglicans in general is that when we gather together, even when we make statements about what's going on in the world. When we

make statements about how we will proceed with treating individuals, no matter the sexual orientation. These are not binding doctrines. We're not telling our people what they have to believe. We're simply saying this is how we want to treat people with integrity, with love, with compassion. Because that is our focus. We're trying to see all people as God's children. We're trying to see all people as God sees them. And believe that God is calling us to see them and accept them and receive them into our midst.

Now today we're going to have a baptism. It's one of the great honors and privileges of being a priest in the church. And in it the parents and god-parents will be making promises for Jeremy to raise him as a Christian. The very same vows that we have taken and renewed on many occasions. We'll do it again. And one of the questions for the congregation is, "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to uphold this person in their life in Christ?" And when I ask you that question you will respond, "We will." And I encourage you to mean it. Because that is what we are called to in ministry.

To help one another live out the vows that are being made in our baptism as we are filled with God's Holy Spirit. When we are adopted as God's children. Brothers and sisters in of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So today as we baptize Jeremy (Remy to his friends) take those vows again for yourself. Listen to them. Answer them with truth and integrity in and of yourself. And as you hear the stories coming out of the general convention remember that those people took the very same vows.

Gregory Hein – Rector

Renee' Evans – Transcriptionist