

Living Mission: Proclamation, Discipleship, Servanthood

addresses given by The Right Reverend Robert J. O'Neill, Bishop of Colorado
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Introduction

During the past two years, even in the midst of insuring that the most basic functions of the Bishop's Office are being done, I have been very intentional about trying to maintain a two-fold focus to my work as the tenth Bishop of Colorado.

On the one hand, there has been a crisis in the Church to deal with—a crisis precipitated, as we all know, by the actions of our General Convention in 2003 and by the actions of the Diocese of New Westminster in Canada. It is simply a fact of our common life and ministry—a difficult, troublesome, challenging fact with which all of us have had to wrestle—and I have not, for a moment, wanted either to overstate its dimensions nor to minimize or deny its reality. It is what it is. It has affected our lives locally, nationally, and internationally, and all of us have had to face into it in various ways. As you know, I formed a Task Force in 2003, to help us all consider how we as a diocese might choose to live together even in the midst of profound disagreement, how I might exercise leadership within the diocese and wider church, and how we might live and work and even be more deeply formed as a body by our differences. During 2004, with the report of the Bishop's Task Force in hand, we held a series of meetings throughout the Fall—most significantly, a series of full day meetings for clergy that were held over a three month period. At the same time, the Windsor Report was released. It has been received subsequently by various bodies throughout the Communion. There have been meetings of Primates and Bishops, of the Anglican Consultative Council, of other groups, formal and informal, official and unofficial, liberal and conservative, and on it goes.

It is important to say that the key issues before the Anglican Communion are not, frankly, issues of human sexuality but instead touch upon more basic matters regarding authority, accountability, interdependence and the emerging identity of Anglicanism as a worldwide body. It would seem that we are a Communion coming of age in a global society. Clearly, there is more work to be done—particularly as our General Convention looms before us next summer and everyone's level of either anxiety or indifference escalates. As a next step, I want you to know that we will do more in this diocese. It is important for our health and integrity as a body that we not slide passively toward the next General Convention, but that we move toward it thoughtfully and proactively—that we do the work of preparing, educating, informing, and equipping ourselves to understand not just issues of sexuality but the breadth of issues that are before our Church and our Communion so that we might respond thoughtfully, lovingly, and faithfully to whatever may unfold. To that end, I am now in the process of organizing both educational materials and resources for congregations as well as a series of meetings that

I will hold throughout the diocese from January to May 2006 for teaching about, reflecting upon, and discussing these issues.

On the other hand, and at the same time, I have also been acutely aware of the admonition of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Donald Coggan, some years ago when he observed that “Nothing would please the devil more than that the Church should become consumed by issues—[whatever they might be]—anything but the saving work of Jesus Christ.” And he is right. Nothing would please the devil more than that we should become consumed by issues. And for that reason, it has been important to me to continue to hold up, and to keep before us, and to focus our attention on, the mission of the Church—the most basic work to which we are all called. I have done so not to avoid the issues—and certainly not to deny the strained relationships within our Church and our Communion—but because I know that by focusing on our mission, by engaging and participating each of us in the redemptive work of God, we will, as a body, be given the perspective, the context, the inspiration, the direction, that we need. I cannot say that strongly enough. When we engage our mission as the Body of Christ, we are given, by the grace of God, the perspective, the context, the inspiration, and the direction that we need as people of God whatever circumstances or issues we may face.

Last year Jim Lemler was our keynote speaker for our convention, and he spoke quite engagingly about mission. This year I have chosen not to have a keynote speaker. Instead, I have chosen to speak to you—yes, about the mission of the Church, but more specifically about three key aspects of our mission: proclamation, discipleship, and servanthood. Instead of giving a single bishop’s address, I have chosen to make three presentations—each offering a time for prayer and praise, each providing an opportunity to reflect on scripture, and each taking time to outline the key initiatives that we are putting in place in the Diocese of Colorado.

Because there are so many ways in which people talk about the word “mission,” I want to say a few things up front. Mission, strictly understood, is not something *we* do, it is instead God’s work. It is traditionally called the *missio dei*—referring to God’s redemption of a sinful and broken world through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus the Christ. Our work, our mission, therefore is to participate in that redeeming work through the power of the Holy Spirit, each of us according to the gifts given to us. The mission of the Church involves every aspect of our life together—prayer, worship, study, evangelism, stewardship, outreach, pastoral care, and so on—and in that sense, I would say that our mission is, in fact, a dynamic process of entering ever more deeply into relationship with Jesus and living ever more fully out of that relationship. That’s the definition. The mission of the Church is “a dynamic process of entering ever more deeply into relationship with Jesus and living ever more fully out of that relationship.” I would say, too, that the mission of the Church is evidenced by three distinct but interdependent activities that describe this process—proclamation, discipleship, and servanthood.

This is just one model, one way of thinking about our work, our mission, as people of God. It is not a linear model, something that moves lockstep from one stage to

the next. Nor to my thinking is it circular, something that loops back around over and over again. Rather, I like to think of these three aspects of our mission as separate threads in an intricate and richly woven fabric—each strand dependent upon the other, each inseparably linked, and when any one thread is itself frayed or missing, then the fabric is weakened and its beauty diminished.

Proclamation. Discipleship. Servanthood.

These are the words upon which we will reflect today and tomorrow—even as we conduct the business of convention. I hope that these three words can be both a challenge and a check-list for us all—a way of giving us the context, the perspective, the inspiration and direction that we need; a way of keeping us focused; a way of pointing to what's important; a way to remind us of what we may be missing in our work together; and a way of inspiring us collectively to participate ever more deeply in the redemptive work of God in Christ.

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I. Proclamation

“Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’”

—Mark 1:14-15

Years ago, the eighth Bishop of Colorado, Bill Frey, had a question that he liked to ask of those who were seeking ordination in the Episcopal Church. It was a very basic, very simple, very straight forward question. “What is the good news?” he would ask. It was not a rhetorical question. Bill Frey wanted to hear each aspirant’s answer when he interviewed them. And to make it just a little more challenging, he asked them to answer the question in one hundred words or less, in plain language, without using “church lingo.”

“What is the good news?” he liked to ask.

If I were to ask you the same question, how would you answer it? Well, how would you? What would tell someone who did not know the good news? Could you do it? Could you do it clearly? Could you do it concisely? Could you do it in a way that it was both accessible and inviting? What would *you* say is the good news?

Think about it. Is it a difficult or an easy question for you to answer? (And don’t worry, I am going to let you off the hook.)

Here’s how Jesus answers that question (and incidentally, he does it in nineteen words). “The time is fulfilled,” he says, “and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” These words appear at the very beginning of Mark’s gospel just one third of the way through the first chapter. Only a few events have taken place at this point according to Mark. John the Baptist has appeared in the wilderness. Jesus has been baptized by John, and Jesus has been driven by the Spirit into the wilderness where he has been tempted by Satan and ministered to by angels. And then come these words—the very first words spoken publicly by Jesus in Mark’s gospel—Jesus’ proclamation of the good news. First, the statement of the good news, that “the time is fulfilled, and [that] the kingdom of God has come near,” followed then by an invitation to “repent, and believe in the good news.”

It is so easy to blow right by these words. But they are so significant. Think about it. The time is fulfilled. What’s that about? Could it be that the opportunity to know and to experience and to live in and to respond to the life-giving, life-changing, life-fulfilling love of God is now—that it is neither something to be discovered at some distant moment in the future, nor is it some lost opportunity of the past, but that it is instead at hand? Could it be as Jean-Pierre de Caussade observed nearly three hundred years ago,

that the Holy is “what lies hidden in every moment of the day”?¹ Right now? And could it be that the kingdom of God has actually drawn near—that that place, that realm in which we can be embraced by God in love and in which our lives can be governed by divine love, is not actually “out there” somewhere but is, instead, right here in this place, already among us?

If so, then that is indeed good news. We need look no further, Jesus says. The search is over, Jesus says. We need only to accept the invitation. We need only to repent—literally “to turn,” or as some might say, “to reposition” ourselves. The Greek word is *metanoia* which implies having a change of heart and mind. Any way you cut it, the invitation not simply to live differently or to act differently but to be willing to be deeply and profoundly transformed, to be willing to see and to experience all of this world in a new and life-giving way.

“The time is fulfilled,” Jesus says, “and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

Mark recognizes, of course, that this statement by Jesus is in fact self-referential. Those who follow Jesus come to recognize that Jesus is himself the embodiment of the gospel. They come to see that he is indeed the Christ, the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel, the Word of God made flesh. They come to understand that Jesus is himself the good news; that everything he says and does and is *is* the good news; that his life, death, resurrection, and ascension is in itself the complete revelation, the very incarnation, of the good news; and as such, they recognize that Jesus is himself the way into Life. Their experience of Jesus is so powerful that they cannot contain themselves. Their relationship to Jesus is so profoundly life-giving that they cannot help but share it with others. It is inescapable. It is inevitable. It is unavoidable. “We do not proclaim ourselves,” Paul writes after his own dramatic encounter with the risen Christ, “we proclaim Jesus [the] Christ as Lord”²—in whom, as John puts it, is Life.

The proclamation of the gospel is the fundamental activity, the most basic work, of the Christian community. New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright, puts it very plainly. “Christianity did not spread by magic,” he writes.³ Jesus’ disciples, the early Christian community, understood that they had been given a sacred and holy gift—the gift of that new life for which not only they but all the world deeply hungered. And they went into the world with their hearts on fire, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to share that gift—naming the good news that the kingdom of God is indeed at hand; pointing to the reality of the kingdom of God revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; offering a transcendent and life-giving vision to a world that needed to see it but whose eyes were dim; and inviting others into greater life by embracing a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

¹ Jean-Pierre de Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, John Beevers trans. (New York: Doubleday, 1975), page 34.

² 2 Corinthians 4:5

³ N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), page 360.

This is evangelism, defined by Archbishop William Temple and adopted by the Episcopal Church's General Convention in 1973 as, "The presentation of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in such ways that persons may be led to believe in Him as Saviour, and follow Him as Lord within the fellowship of His Church." It is an essential, inseparable, foundational piece of our mission. We say it in our own baptismal covenant—that we will "proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ."⁴ And if we are honest with ourselves, we know too that we in the Episcopal Church resist that work in many ways. There are, as we all know, many reasons—some of them good and some of them not. As one bishop put it many years ago, "At best, in the Episcopal Church, we approach evangelism like this. We build the most beautiful aquarium that we can possibly build. We place it right next to the ocean, and then we hope—we hope that the fish will be so moved that they will jump in."

But it takes more. No one finds God alone. No one discovers the good news of the kingdom of God and the new life of Jesus without an invitation.

Over the past two years, many of you have heard me tell the story of how I came into the Episcopal Church—how my freshman roommate at TCU, Russ Cushman, not only invited me to Church but dared to ask some very basic questions (things like, "So who do you think Jesus is?" and, "What do you think it means to follow Jesus?"); how he talked freely about his faith and the liveliness of the Holy Spirit; and how, over time and in relationship to the wonderful folks at Trinity Episcopal Church in Fort Worth and in the context of the Eucharist itself, I had a profound and deeply moving experience of conversion. What you don't know, however, is that I actually lost touch with Russ after my freshman year in college—until last year that is, when I decided to see if I could locate him. I did a simple search on the internet, and surprisingly only one name came up—Russell C. Cushman in Navasota, Texas. I called the number, apologized to the woman who answered the phone for intruding, but said that I was looking for a Russ Cushman who had been my roommate during my freshman year at TCU. She said, "Rob, you have found the right one." I said, "Linda, is that you?"

That evening, Russ and I talked for the first time in thirty years. After a while, he said, "So Rob, did you ever go to seminary like you were thinking about?" I admitted that indeed I had and that I had even graduated. I told him that I had been ordained and had served in Colorado and Massachusetts. And then I told him that I had recently become the Bishop of Colorado. There was dead silence on the other end of the phone. And after a moment, I heard Russ saying in his distinct east Texas drawl, "Oh my gosh. And to think that I witnessed to you over beers at Fat Al's!"

I asked Russ where exactly Navasota was, explaining to him that in a month I would be at a meeting of the House of Bishops in a place called Camp Allen. Again there was dead silence on the other end of the phone. And then again, in that same east Texas drawl, "Oh my gosh. I live five miles from Camp Allen."

⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer*, page 305.

And so, one year ago this past March, I saw Russ Cushman for the first time in more than thirty years. I went to Church with he and Linda. We had lunch together. And as Russ drove me back to Camp Allen that afternoon, with the sun playing off the trees along the highway, I said, “Russ, there’s only one thing I really need to say to you.” He said, “what’s that?” And I said, “I want to thank you. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for caring enough about your faith to share it with me. It has made all the difference.”

Proclamation. “The presentation of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in such ways that persons may be led to believe in Him as Saviour, and follow Him as Lord within the fellowship of His Church.”⁵

It is not only my desire, but my passion and intent to hold up this ministry of evangelism in the Diocese of Colorado. Last year at our diocesan convention, I said that it was a priority, and this year that priority is reflected in our proposed budget. In reorganizing the staff in the Bishop’s Office, I have created the position of Canon Missioner for the diocese. This position, now filled by Lou Blanchard, is specifically designed to focus our attention on evangelism, church growth, and congregational development. In her capacity as Canon Missioner, Lou is working with the newly formed Mission Strategy Committee, chaired by Ray Hess, to energize, support and grow our Church by developing a comprehensive strategy of evangelism that establishes new congregations, and develops existing congregations throughout the Diocese of Colorado. Those words come from the purpose statement of the Mission Strategy Committee, and you will hear more from them later in this convention. To support the work of planting, growing, and developing congregations, I have organized this past year a group of Congregational Development Consultants—clergy already resident in the diocese, all of whom have been trained and educated in various ways in the work of congregational development, all of whom are now working with the leadership of various congregations to guide and support them either in their growth or through some key transition in their life. Moreover, and with an eye to equipping congregational leadership for growth and development over the long term, we will begin next Fall the first class in this diocese of the Church Development Institute—a comprehensive, core program in congregational development; a two-year parish leadership training course for clergy and laity. This is a significant leadership training program for clergy and laity. It will ask a significant commitment of those participating. But I encourage you all to look into it and to consider making the commitment and the investment for the sake of building up the Body of Christ.

The work of planting and growing new churches, and of developing existing congregations, cannot take place, of course, without funding. We have been fortunate this year, for the most part, in our ability to scrape together in creative ways enough money to support our new congregations. There are lots of stories to tell. Two years ago, one brand new congregation, Saint Francis in Dillon, was established. That group is growing and is now using space in a Lutheran Church for their worship every Sunday afternoon. Last February, I signed papers for the purchase of a new building in La Veta, and a few

⁵ Archbishop William Temple

months later I joined them to dedicate their new space after its renovation. Last Sunday, the Church of Santiago, dedicated their new space in which they plan to develop a number of ministries to that community. Just two days ago, I dedicated the new church of All Saints in Battlement Mesa—the result of the commitment and vision of a group of thirty retirees, who with the support of the mountain and western regions of this diocese, have built a church building not only for themselves but for those to come. And tomorrow morning, we will officially welcome the Episcopal ministry at Briargate, now known as Church of the Good Shepherd, as an official mission congregation of this diocese. Sadly, not all of new congregations make it. And this past summer, after considerable struggle and no small amount of debate, the doors of New Life Church in Littleton were closed. This was a mission born out of a specific commitment to the work of evangelism—to really reaching out, not just to other Episcopalians, but to the unchurched. I do not want us as a body to lose that vision or commitment, and I am pleased to say that while the doors of New Life have closed, the proceeds of the sale of that property, almost \$900,000, have now been put into our new Mission Strategy Fund which will be used in the future specifically to plant and build new congregations.

It is just the beginning. There is much more to do.

You will need to forgive me, but it is important that I say one more thing. The growth of the Church is simply not the ministry of the bishop alone, nor is it the consequence of having just the right program or programs in place. The work of proclaiming the gospel—the ministry of evangelism, so key, so absolutely essential to our mission—is your work. It is every Christian’s responsibility, our collective work. So let me challenge each of you. Do you know that there is good news for a world that is desperately in need of a more transcendent and life-giving vision of itself? Do you care enough about your faith to extend the invitation to someone else? Five years, ten years, twenty years, thirty years from now, will anybody pick up the phone and thank you?

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Let us pray:

O God of all the nations of the earth: Remember the multitudes who have been created in your image but have not known the redeeming work of our Savior Jesus Christ; and grant that by the prayers and labors of your holy Church, they may be brought to know and to love you as you have been revealed in your Son; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God; for ever and ever. Amen.

II. Discipleship

“As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, [Jesus] saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.”

—Matthew 4:18-20

Discipleship is a curious word. I will admit, up front, that to my more catholic sensibilities, it is a word that comes across with a decidedly protestant ring. I think, for example, of the way in which that perfectly good noun, “disciple,” has now been turned in some circles into a verb, so that people say things like “I’m ‘discipling’ some of the new folks in our church” or “You know, it’s not enough just to be baptized, we all need to be ‘discipled.’” Okay. I understand. I know what it means. It’s even a good thing to do. The grammar just doesn’t quite work for me. Even so, the fact that the word may have some edge to some of us is, I believe, helpful. After all, what are we about, what is our mission, if we are not first and foremost disciples?

Discipleship. It points very directly to the heart, the center, of who we are, of what we profess to be, as Christians—followers, learners, apprentices, pupils, those whose allegiance is given to the instruction and commitments of the one we call Teacher (with a capital “T”) namely, Jesus.

One of the great biblical images of discipleship is contained in the story of the calling of Peter and Andrew found at the beginning of Matthew’s gospel. It is stunning in its simplicity. “As he walked by the Sea of Galilee,” Matthew writes, “[Jesus] saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And [Jesus] said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.” That’s it. Nothing more. No commentary. Simon Peter and Andrew are just going about their business (which is, incidentally, an interesting detail in the story—namely, that Jesus comes to them at their place of business, at the office so to speak). Jesus happens to be walking by. He says follow me, and they go—immediately, right then and there, with no more assurance apparently than the cryptic promise of being made into something new, those who “fish for people.”

I point to this story because so much of our discussion of mission in the Church today seems to begin in a very different place—not at the beginning of Matthew’s gospel, but at the end. People love to point to Matthew 28—that passage in which the risen Christ appears to the disciples on the mountaintop and says to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with

you always, to the end of the age.”⁶ People love to hold up the imperative in that passage—to go, go into the world, go make disciples. People often hold up the imperative of that great commission—sometimes in a critical way, sometimes as a challenge, sometimes with no small amount of pride and condescension—and then say things like, “We live by the Great Commission,” or, “We take the Great Commission seriously.” And I will acknowledge readily that comments like that are, in many ways, a well-deserved corrective to a certain apathy and complacency toward the mission imperatives of the gospel on the part of the Church.

But hold on. Time out. Take a breath. Certainly, if we claim the name Christian, we are indeed sent out into the world by Jesus to make disciples, to go, to baptize and to teach. If we claim the name Christian, the great commission is not, as some are wont to say, the great option. But even so, we cannot move there too quickly.

Remember, the fundamental movement of discipleship is not, first and foremost, a movement into the world, but rather it is a movement into relationship. “As he walked by the Sea of Galilee,” Matthew writes, “[Jesus] saw two brothers....and he said to them, ‘Follow me.’ It’s not “go.” It’s “follow.” In John’s gospel the invitation is a very gentle “come and see.”⁷ To be a disciple is, first of all, to enter into relationship with Jesus. And if we read the text further, we come to see also that this relationship is transformational. For neither Simon Peter nor Andrew (nor James nor John nor any of the others for that matter) will ever be able simply to go about their business as they always have. They will learn instead to “fish” in a new way, and even more importantly, they will have to be willing to pay the cost of embracing this new relationship. For none of them will be able to stay where they are. None of them will be able to sit still. All of them must leave their nets behind, and all of them must be willing to move wherever Jesus may lead them. And that’s the point. The more willingly and deeply they are drawn into relationship with Jesus, the more profoundly their hearts and minds and souls are changed and the more powerful their witness to the love of God in the world becomes.

That is the first point about discipleship. That is discipleship—being willing to move on every level, leaving the old life behind, following Jesus wherever he may lead the way, sitting at his feet so to speak, taking in not only what he says but who he is on the deepest level of our being, allowing our lives to be reoriented and our selves (our deepest self) to be transformed. This is no small or superficial proposition.

When the disciples set out, they have no idea where they will be led. They cannot possibly imagine the courage that they will need to exercise. They have no idea of the death that they will need to die. It’s like that moment in the *Chronicles of Narnia* when for the first time the children are about to meet Aslan, the great lion, the Christ figure in the story. Having only just arrived in Narnia—where because of the spell of the White Witch it is always winter but never Christmas—the children have only just heard that “Aslan is on the move.” There is some apprehension in the air at the prospect of meeting

⁶ Matthew 28:18-20

⁷ John 1:39

a lion, and thus Susan asks, “Is he—quite safe?” And the answer in return is, “Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.”⁸

That’s the second point about discipleship. To be a disciple is neither safe nor comfortable. But it is good. And it is life changing. And it is what our world needs. In a world in which religion (Christianity included) is so distorted, so abused, and so regularly and willfully co-opted to rationalize and to justify and to glorify the politics of power and violence, we need true disciples—deeply committed, profoundly wise and thoughtful, unfailingly prayerful and humble, courageous and compassionate disciples of Jesus Christ.

“Follow me,” Jesus says. It is what we commit ourselves to in baptism when we say that we will turn, accept, trust, follow and obey Jesus as Lord and Savior.⁹ It is not safe. It is, in fact, a commitment to die to self and to be reborn. It is, in fact, a commitment to deep and profound transformation. It is not safe. But it is good. And none of us, not one of us, is exempt.

This is so important. The strength of our witness as Christians is directly proportionate to the depth of our relationship to Jesus. If we take our mission seriously, we must take our formation as disciples seriously. And in the Diocese of Colorado, I want to challenge us to commit collectively to the lifelong work of our own formation as disciples of Christ. Our growth in faith does not happen accidentally by sitting passively in a pew. Christian faith is not something we absorb as if by osmosis. Our formation, requires not only our attention but our intention. It requires our time, our care, our commitment. Our formation as disciples demands an ongoing disciplined life of prayer, of regular participation in the sacramental life of the church, a practice of studying the scripture, a practice of fearless self-examination and reflection within the fellowship of the Body, the hard work of integrating our experience of the living God with our life in the world. There is no other way to say it. Formation is a lifelong process requiring a lifelong commitment.

With that in mind, Christian formation is a priority in this diocese and is again significantly reflected in the proposed budget. The proposed operating budget for 2006, in fact, puts more resources into the work of Christian formation than ever before.

This past year, as many of you know, I expanded Neil Riley’s position as Youth Pastor into that of Canon for Faith Formation—a position with responsibility for the Christian education and formation for children, youth, young adults and adults. The purpose of the Faith Formation Office is to equip, encourage, and empower faith formation leadership and ministry at the local parish level—encouraging and empowering local churches, equipping and training faith formation leadership, and developing and growing faith formation programs that foster growth at the local level. This past March, Neil extended an open invitation to those working with faith formation in the diocese,

⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Book Two, “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe” (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), page 80.

⁹ *The Book of Common Prayer*, page 302-303.

and that group participated in a visioning process, identifying seven areas for the ministry of faith formation to focus on in the diocese. Among other things, we will this year lay the groundwork for more fully engaging college and young adult ministry throughout the diocese, and this year's proposed budget includes several servant-leadership training opportunities and gatherings for college students and young adults. In addition to existing programs for youth—like our Genesis and Quest weekends—the department for faith formation will also conduct a new spiritual retreat weekend for youth and youth leaders. Knowing too that a vital ministry of summer camping is essential for strong and healthy Christian education programs, I have spent the past year having conversations with a variety of people throughout the diocese about the future of youth camping here in Colorado. I have met with members of the boards of both Trinity Ranch and Camp Illium about our relationships and their desires for the future. I have done so to begin a process of developing a vision for diocesan youth camping ministries. Now it is time to take it a step further. I am pleased to announce that my office has now entered into a partnership with the board of Trinity Ranch in which our Faith Formation Office will assume responsibility for the programming and staffing of all summer camp session there this coming summer. A camp program committee has already been put together to help us take this next step. Further, I am asking this convention as a sign of our collective commitment to children and youth to formally establish a Task Force whose responsibility it will be to develop a new vision for youth camping in the Diocese of Colorado and to report back to this convention in 2006.

Because our formation in faith is a lifelong task, I am pleased to announce that next June (June 2-4) at Snow Mountain Ranch, we will hold our first annual “Faith For Life Weekend”—a diocesan experience for all ages that will include children and youth activities, seminars for all ages, fun, and faith growing experiences. This year's theme will be “Marking Milestones” and our keynote speaker will be Dick Hardell, a great speaker, a Lutheran pastor from the Youth and Family Institute. This is intended to be an opportunity for all of us all over the diocese to gather in a new way—something other than a convention. There will be, I guarantee, no resolutions proposed or debated, not a single piece of legislation, and I encourage you all to participate.

To be a disciple is to be willing to be drawn ever more deeply into relationship with Jesus—to follow, wherever he may lead the way. It is not safe. But it is good, and it does not happen accidentally.

The invitation is God's. The response is ours.

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Let us pray:

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a body of true disciples, a holy temple, acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

III. Servanthood

“He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet...I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.’”

—John 13:12-15

Every Sunday we gather at the altar and break bread in our celebration of the Holy Eucharist, and we do this, we say, in remembrance of Jesus. That simple act, of course, directs our attention back to that last supper that Jesus shared with his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion—a significant moment, a poignant moment, a moment charged with divine meaning, to be sure—Jesus’ last night on earth, but not (and this is significant) Jesus’ last act during his earthly ministry. As such it is important to remember that our celebration of the Eucharist is not just a recollection of the last supper itself—as if on Sunday mornings we were simply calling to mind an old story, as if our remembrance were only the sentimental recollection of a specific meal, however touching, shared between Jesus and his disciples. No, our remembrance during the Eucharist, is not just about the activities at the last supper. When we eat the bread and drink the wine, when we take into ourselves the body and blood of the living Christ, we are being drawn to a much deeper level of awareness. Jesus’ invitation to his disciples to “do this” “in remembrance” of him is not about the meal. Nor is it simply about everything that had happened up to that point. Far more importantly, far more challengingly, it points to everything that happened next. Our remembrance, in other words, directs our hearts and minds and souls (and yes, if we really get it, our bodies too) to nothing less than the cross.

John tells us in his gospel that Jesus “knew that his hour had come,” and then John says that Jesus, “having loved his own who were in the world, ...loved them to the end.”¹⁰ (Please do not miss that last phrase. It is important.) And then John observes that in that spirit of loving them to the end, Jesus “got up from the table.”¹¹ The descriptive language that John uses here in the thirteenth chapter is so rich. John says that even as one into whose hands God had given all things, Jesus got up from the table. He left his rightful place. He took off his robe. He tied a towel around his waist, and he began to wash the disciples’ feet and wipe them with the towel.

But hold on. We will miss the point—we will fail to grasp the real power here—if we are not mindful of all the various agendas that are also there around the table.

There is Peter—the rock upon whom God’s Church is to be built, the one who first dared to say it, the one who first dared to speak it out loud, to name it, to call Jesus the messiah, the Son of the living God. Peter is profoundly uncomfortable with what is taking place. What Jesus is doing simply does not conform to his image of how the Holy One of Israel, God’s anointed, should be acting. Peter can’t stand it. It is unbearable. And

¹⁰ John 13.1

¹¹ John 13.4

he protests, as only Peter can protest, with ultimate certainty and clarity. “You will never wash my feet,” he says definitively. And no sooner have the words have left his mouth, than he finds himself rebuked (once again) by the very one whom he so deeply loves and desires to follow. “Unless I wash you,” Jesus says, “you have no share in me.” And with that, Peter is challenged to understand that in spite of all his zeal and affection, in spite of all his real inspiration, his image of the Christ—his concept of who the messiah is and what the messiah should be doing—is simply wrong. One more moment of humiliation for Peter. One more opportunity for his salvation.

Judas is also there at the table, and he too has his agenda. As John puts it, speaking I believe of that capacity for betrayal that is latent in every one of us, “the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas...to betray [Jesus].”¹² It could be, I sometimes think, that Judas was not really such a bad person—just misguided. Perhaps when Jesus told Judas to go and to do what he had to do, Judas thought that he was actually being given direction and permission to make contact with the authorities. Perhaps Judas thought that this act would be the catalyst that would ignite the long awaited rebellion, and that he, Judas, was being given a unique opportunity to play a key role in the deliverance of his people. In which case, Judas was simply wrong—so blind, so fixed, so set, so certain of his convictions, so insistent on his ways, that he could not see the way of God. That is always a possibility—not just for Judas but for all of us. It is equally possible, too, the Judas was simply a scoundrel—a calculating, malicious, self-absorbed individual. Perhaps Judas had already seen the handwriting on the wall. Perhaps he knew that Jesus’ followers really had no clout in the face of Roman imperial power. Perhaps Judas had come to despise the people surrounding Jesus. Perhaps he had been embarrassed by the pitiful showing that they had all made upon entering Jerusalem. Perhaps he had decided that it was simply time to cut his losses—that this movement was doomed to failure and needed to be put down once and for all; that he could wait no longer; that he should act; that he must act; that somebody for God’s sake should take some action, and so he would go to the authorities. In which case, he was still wrong, dead wrong—so blind, so fixed, so set, so certain of his convictions, so insistent on his ways, that he could not see the greater way of God unfolding before his eyes.

It is from that table—like any and every table, one surrounded by competing and conflicting agendas, some right and some wrong—that Jesus gets up. Jesus leaves his rightful place. He takes off his robe. He ties a towel around his waist, and he begins to wash the disciples’ feet. And to everyone around that table—with all the various agendas and desires and fears that they bring; with all their varied histories, and wounds, and ego needs and neurosis—to everyone around that table, Jesus says, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” It is not an option. “I have set you an example,” Jesus says, “that you also should do as I have done to you.”¹³

¹² John 13.2

¹³ John 13:12-15

Servanthood. This is the fundamental posture of the Christian life, apart from which our proclamation of the faith is simply empty words and apart from which our discipleship is nothing more than a self-satisfying delusion.

“Do you know what I have done to you?” Jesus asks. Do you know? Not “What is it that I have done?” But “What does it mean?” Think about it. Jesus stops. He leaves the table. He relinquishes his position. He stoops before his disciples. He takes their dirty wayward feet in his hands, and he washes them. What an image. What a revelation—beyond words, beyond any single action. Do you see? “This is who I am,” Jesus says in effect. “This is who God is. This is what divine love looks like. This is who you are to become.” And if we would but dare to open our eyes, we would come to see that this, too, is the cross—that moment, that place, where the righteousness of God meets the sinfulness of humankind with complete, no holds barred, unequivocal, unconditional, self-surrender. The cross—that moment, that place, that event, that unmerited divine gift, in which the righteousness and holiness of God meets completely, fully, and at every level, the sinfulness and brokenness of humanity. It is the ultimate embrace of “the other.” True communion.

“Do this,” Jesus tells his disciples. “Do this,” he says, “in remembrance of me.”

This is who the Christ is, from the beginning. This is who we are to become.

“I have given you an example,” Jesus says. Do you see? Are you with me? Our mission, our participation in the redeeming work of God in this world, derives its authority not from our willingness to die for a cause but in our ability to die to ourselves. “Let the same mind be in you,” writes Paul in Philippians, “that was [also] in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself....taking the form of a [servant]....”¹⁴

We so sell ourselves short as Christians when we think that servanthood is simply an outreach program. We so sell ourselves short when we think that servanthood is simply a charitable activity, simply doing some good deeds for some deserving people. It is so much more. Servanthood, my dear brothers and sisters, is not an act, it is a way of being. Servanthood is the fundamental posture of divine relationship. It is the only posture that true love knows. This is the love evidenced at the last supper. This is the love that is revealed in all of its challenging and haunting power on the cross. This posture—this way of being, heart, mind, soul, and body—is the repentance, the *metanoia* (literally, the “change of mind,” the complete reorientation of our being) to which Jesus calls us from the very beginning.

We would do well to learn this way of self-emptying, this way of *kenosis*. We would do well to have “this mind” in us that is also in Christ Jesus—in our lives, in our churches, in our diocese, indeed in our worldwide communion. Our world is plagued by divisions—deep, violent, deadly divisions—driven by agendas that all too often bear the

¹⁴ Philippians 2:5-7 (Note: I have chosen here to translate the word “slave” as “servant”—an equally accurate translation of the Greek, but one that is more consistent with the theme at hand.)

name of God and all too often have absolutely nothing to do with God. It is shameful and appalling that our faith continues to be used in such destructive ways.

So look to the cross. What do you see? Look closely, thoughtfully, prayerfully, and not just once, but again and again. Human suffering, frankly, knows no division— theological, political, or otherwise. And God’s compassion, frankly, challenges us to get out of ourselves—to get out of our limited and self-limiting and isolated little worlds for God’s sake. And our ability to embrace this posture, this way of servanthood, is indeed the corrective, the gift, the way of life, the transcendent vision, that our world so desperately needs.

In this diocese that posture is being engaged and it is being lived out in so many different ways, most evidently in local parishes. All around the Diocese of Colorado all kinds of servant ministries are taking place. There are food pantries. There are prison ministries. There are ministries to battered women. There are ministries to the homeless, disaster relief ministries, missionary ministries, and more. I am grateful to all of you who so willingly and generously and selflessly serve others in this way, and I want to encourage you all to support these undertakings fully. These are the tangible, concrete, visible ways that we live out the call of God in the world. These are the ways in which we manifest the divine love of God and become the Body of Christ incarnate in this world.

At this convention, we will hear later about some of the other ways we as a diocese are attempting to reach out even more fully as a body. In a little while, Chris Johnson will speak to us about the Jubilee Ministries here in Colorado. All of these ministries reflect a response to Jesus’ mandate to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to give drink to those who thirst, and Chris will describe these ministries to you a little later in some detail. Also this morning, you will hear from Father Anderia Arok, the priest of our Sudanese congregation. This is a congregation that is hosted by the good graces of St. John’s Cathedral and has been supported by the generosity of many in the diocese. I am proud to say that we as a diocese contribute as well to the support of our Sudanese brothers and sisters and that we will do even more so in the coming year. As you know, this is a people who know suffering that none of us can begin to imagine. Coming from a country that has been so devastated by war, so devastated by violence, and is struggling to find the life-giving renewal and healing that is so needed, our sisters and brothers from the Sudan have much to teach us. Father Anderia will talk a little bit about the work and ministry of the Sudanese congregation, and I’m so pleased that they are here today among us as a part of this body, reminding us of the life and needs of others in our world. We will also hear this morning about the *Three Bishops’ Fund*—an initiative of a wonderful ministry in this diocese, the Colorado Haiti Project. They will describe later in more detail the opportunity that all of us have to reach out to Haiti and particularly to the people of Petit Trou de Nippes where Father Kessner Gracia serves.

But there’s more, much more that we can do.

Any of you who have been around for a while know that we in Colorado have a wonderful heritage of servant ministry here. I think, for example, of the great gift of the

St. Francis Center founded and established more than twenty years ago to care for the homeless. I think also of what used to be called Central Denver Community Services (now Metro Caring), reaching out to those in need in Denver. I recall fondly the day I arrived as a newly-ordained priest at St. John's Cathedral in 1982 and Alice Stark, then director of Central Denver Community Services, hauled me over to her office, sat me down and said, "OK, now, it's time for me to tell you what's what." And indeed, when it came to serving the poor, Alice did know what was what, not just in her head but in her heart. Now it's time to build anew upon this great heritage, and so this year I am asking our deacons—through the leadership of the Diaconal Council—to undertake the task of looking at all the ways we exercise our ministry of servanthood to others across the diocese and to make recommendations about how we can deepen and strengthen and further develop that way of being, that posture of divine love, in the Diocese of Colorado.

Jesus left his place at the table. He left his place at the table. He said to those who would follow him, "Do you know what I have done to you?"

Well, do you know?

There is much talk in our lives these days about "a way forward." And it is a good conversation. We need to have it, and we need to engage it thoughtfully. But while there is much talk about "a way forward," may I remind us all that *the* way forward will never be found in a document. It will only be found in our hearts. For the only way forward for any of us is, in fact, the way of the cross. It is the way of life. And it has everything to do with Love.

* * * * *

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen.

A Final Word

Writing to the Church in October of 2003 to address the great tensions that had surfaced, the Primates of the Anglican Communion observed, “that which binds us together is far greater than that which threatens to divide us.” It is a phrase that has been repeated again and again since—in formal communications, in casual conversation, either verbally or in writing. It is not, I would argue, a throw away line, a cheap sop, or a rhetorical pacifier. It is, I believe, the most important statement that has been made to date in our current controversies. That which binds us together is indeed far greater than that which threatens to divide us, for we are, in fact, inescapably bound together in nothing less than the life of the risen and ascended Christ. It is simply a fact, a fundamental reality of our life.

Only as we engage the mission of the Church, only as we undertake the work that God has so audaciously entrusted into our care, only as we participate ever more fully in the redeeming work of the One we call Lord, only then do we come to see and to know and to understand that wonderful and life-giving reality. Hence, these words.

Proclamation. Discipleship. Servanthood.

They are three distinct but interdependent aspects of our mission—separate threads in an intricate and richly woven fabric, each strand dependent upon the other, each inseparably linked, and when any one thread is itself frayed or missing, then the fabric is weakened and its beauty diminished.

I do hope that these three words can be both a challenge and a check-list for us all in Colorado not only today but in the days ahead—a way of giving us the context, the perspective, the inspiration and direction that we need; a way of keeping us focused; a way of pointing to what’s important; a way to remind us of what we may be missing in our work together; a way of leading us collectively to participate ever more deeply in the redemptive work of God in Christ, so that we may come to know, to truly know, the Love in which we are all so miraculously bound together.