



VALUES

Bishop Mary Gray-Reeves' Convention Address

November 7, 2015

When I was in our partner diocese in England for Bishop Rachel's installation as the new Bishop of Gloucester, I also visited the good Christians at St. Swithin's Church for Sunday worship in Lower Quinton, in the Diocese of Gloucester.

There is indeed a St. Swithin! In America only, I assume, St. Swithin is our proverbial church name that we use when we need to speak about something stereotypically church: "at St. Swithin's the altar guild polishes the silver in a clockwise motion around the vessel, just as all good altar guilds do..."

We have surely taken Swithin's name in vain so that we might speak about the ordinary life of church! He was, after all, Bishop of Winchester in the 9th century, but hardly mentioned in documents of his own time. He may have seemed quite ordinary in his day, but was later adopted as the patron saint of reform when Dunstan and Aethelwold of Winchester were inaugurating church reform in the 10th century. Swithin was known for his building and restoring of churches in his time. He was a miracle worker of sorts; in life and posthumously. He was known for his simplicity, traveling on foot, inviting the poor instead of the rich if he gave a banquet, and for focusing on spiritual matters. He sounds like an interesting bishop; yet it seems that it was only after his death that anyone thought so.

Values live on a long time and are sometimes more often noticed in hindsight.

Swithin is also the patron saint of rain. So, instead of using his name to conjure up stereotypes, we should have been praying to him during this long season of drought. It seems to work for England!

I digress – sort of! Robert Springett and I led worship at St. Swithin’s in Lower Quinton. It was all good, and as is stereotypically true, we had what we would call coffee hour, in the back of the church. They call it tea time. Along with our cup of tea (in a proper cup and saucer or mug) in the back of the church, we had a digestive biscuit. A digestive biscuit is exactly what it sounds like: a rather tasteless, fibrous cookie that helps things . . . move along. It was developed by a couple of Scottish doctors and is a fixture of church tea time in the UK. I guess a digestive aid is sometimes required after worship . . .

When we were safely back in the car, all our duties completed, Robert asked if I had been offered a cup of coffee. I replied that I had indeed had that offer; and that I had chosen tea. That is another story. “Did you get a biscuit?”, he asked, since in fact, this bit of hospitality at St. Swithin’s had passed him by on this particular occasion; I am sure unintentionally. I said, “I turned down the digestive biscuit and just stayed with the tea.” I explained I did not seem to have the need for a digestive biscuit just at that moment. He questioned, “Don’t they serve digestive biscuits with tea after church in America?” As though this would be a universal experience of coffee hour/tea time the world over.

“No... digestive biscuits are not quite the rage in the US that they are here,” I responded. “But certainly, we have our own stereotypic reality in our ways of

being church, just as you do here in the UK.” We laughed at how very true that was.

How the altar guild polishes the silver or irons the linens. What we eat and drink. The order in which we do things. How we make decisions. The decisions themselves. These patterns of behavior reflect certain values of our denomination, our institutional life and our spiritual life.

Our values will affect our behavior

Our life experience provides the energetic and creative tension between them

Pattern and ritual can be very good. They are very affirming feedback loops that reinforce behavior and belief. We say in Anglicanism: *Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*. We believe what we pray and we pray what we believe. Our church uses ritual well - not only to keep our digestion steady and our taste for coffee and tea superb, but also to establish our Anglican identity, liturgy, theology, and scriptural approach. The latter have kept the spirits of many over the years energized and flowing well in beautiful, artistic and deeply moving ways. As Anglicans, we are known for our attention to detail. Every gesture of worship has meaning and purpose. Even the digestive biscuit. This is good!

Sometimes we treasure the behavior more than the value

A digestive biscuit is not the only expression of hospitality. The value of order and beauty in the silver and the direction the hands move in the polishing can be present in any substance offered for sacred worship intended for the glory of God. The polishing of a coconut shell in the South Pacific could be the same expression of care and reverence. The values of order, prayerfulness, sensibility, flexibility, thoughtfulness, hospitality, good flow and form, art and beauty, are all

part of our Anglican way. While the cultural expression may differ, one can see these values in Anglicanism the world over, whether it is in silver or coconut shell, woven reeds or silk, music made by mariachi or organ.

It is also a value that our stated values, beliefs and behaviors should be integrated. They should be visible in one another. This is a witness of how we understand God in Christ; at one with one another, wholly a part the same substance. We seek to be a church modeled on this unity, even as we are wildly diverse.

We are a Values-Driven Organization

I think this quality of our Anglican culture offers us an increasingly prophetic voice. Our conversation around human sexuality reflects that while we struggle, we seek to balance and be integrated with our values, beliefs and behaviors as we are able. It took courage and leadership to have the conversation. It may seem that we have failed given the continued disagreement, and yet the values remain. The value of unity in diversity, for example, holds us during times of conflicted discernment. We keep at it. *We are a values-driven organization.*

We Anglicans are gifted at living the deeper things of life and at breaking destructive feedback loops that keep us in patterns of bias, injustice, hopelessness, violence and hurt. Sometimes it takes a while. They are not easy habits to break. They require insight, introspection, self-examination. Slavery, the rights of women and GLBTQ people are notable long engagements of values clarification and ongoing works of justice.

Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi, Lex Vivendi

So we pray, So we worship, So we live

Modern slavery, for example, is ongoing through human and labor trafficking. Our country is the number one consumer of trafficking in the world. We also are the largest exporter of violent media imagery than any other country in the world. There might be a trend there. As a nation, as a church, we can maintain destructive patterns as part of our status quo. We are sometimes unaware, oblivious or overwhelmed by these patterns of behavior that reflect the darkness in which we live. What does it take for us to become active in change when we see the discrepancy between our stated values as a nation and our behavior?

Examining our values can inspire us to change. Such an examination can call us to deeper integrity, intention and spiritual practice. Such reflection keeps us close to the foundation of who God calls us to be as members of the Body of Christ. As we seek to live more deeply into the values we understand as Christian, we take on the likeness of Christ. We take on the mind of Christ. We embody the values of our faith in the world. We embody the behavior that reflects them.

We listen to our prophets, Swithin among them. Sometimes even we are prophetic. I think it is incompatible with Anglican values to only be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The graceful way of Jesus asks more of us than that.

This year, our theme is Values

I invite you to examine the stated values in your congregation, and link them to your patterns of behavior. I invite you to deepen your experience of who Christ is and embody your understanding of him. I invite you to live that presence in the world more richly.

As a diocese we also have values. We discerned and named them in the early stages of the strategic plan we began a few years ago. This past year, diocesan leadership began to connect an exploration of our values with our theme of “Being the Church”. We felt called to become more conscious of how we behaved as church and the values connected to the way we are in the world.

Our values are Christ-centeredness, Reconciliation, Passion, Innovation and Creativity and Integrity. As I invite you to consider your congregational values, please know that we will continue to do the same on our diocesan boards, committees and commissions. We want to strengthen our understanding of what it means to live as a values-driven organization. My prayer is that our local and diocesan values are inter-related; sharing something of a same substance that multiplies those values in the world.

The Bible is a mirror

What you see in the text, you will see in the human experience

The poetic voices of prophets, psalmists, and storytellers were intent on leading their brothers and sisters out of repetitive thinking that kept the Hebrew people stuck in unreflective, passive or misguided ways of being. Throughout history they named reality: the disconnect of values and behaviors, the slide of national identity. They named impotence, hopelessness, disorientation. They named power, victory and might. They named rage. The Bible is a mirror. We know the spectrum of these feelings, thoughts and experiences.

In Psalm 137, a lament over the destruction of Jerusalem, we listen as a people experience the end of life as they know it. Jerusalem was not just a city, it was a dream, a vision, a place where God’s order, God’s values reigned in the world. It

was slipping away as Israel found themselves in exile - yet again. Would not all those experiences from impotence to rage to victory have been felt? Would the challenge to remain the people of God, distinguishable by their values, be possible?

This psalm scares us. We don't like it, especially for the last line, because it speaks to that within ourselves we do not wish to see.

“By the rivers of Babylon – there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion, on the willows there we hung up our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy. Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem’s fall, how they said, “Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!” O daughter of Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!”

The range of human experience. It can overcome us. It is alright to let the darkest stuff sit awhile. Not too long. The rage especially becomes destructive. Deadly. Otherwise we can allow ourselves to be stripped of our values. While studying this psalm with a friend in seminary I remember her sharing with me the first time a man looked at her child in an odd and uncomfortable way that concerned her and made her think he would do harm to her child. She shared, “I thought to myself, if you take one step closer to my child, I will kill you.” I was disturbed by the thought, but then I had my first child. I remember the first time I

had a similar experience. The range of my human emotion and experience expanded. I realized I might do something of which I never thought myself capable. My values seemed so unimportant, overridden in that moment.

What is left when one is in the midst of such despair or fear or rage? What do we do when our foundation itself seems to have slipped away? What happens when there is no integration between who we say we are and how we behave?

Our faith calls us to hold fast, to live past the feeling and be empowered by God's vision of hope and freedom

Through our baptismal covenant we are called daily to embody more thoroughly our values as the people of God. I have a little bookmark stuck up on the cabinet behind my desk at home. It reads: "Every day, she did brave things." Someone sent it to me after Michael died. For a while, each day I would name something I did as 'brave'. Sometimes I would clap for myself. If I found something on his computer or fixed something mechanical (these are not my skill set!), or just got out of bed, I would name it as brave and applaud. Those little things strengthened me and made me brave for the big things.

I was reminded that it is possible to examine our lives, step out and make change; even when we would rather return to the past or just draw the sheets over our head. It reminded me that it is not only possible to express our values with greater integrity, it is essential to being the people of God. As best as I was able, through this past year, I have tried to be a values-driven person.

Values develop and grow

They do not appear perfectly lived over-night

We will spend some time at our tables in Lectio Divina on our reading from Morning Prayer. I want though to spend a few minutes in the text with you. This story has come alive for me over the last couple of years as I have listened to rabbis teach on it. There are a couple of points I learned from them that I would like to share with you as, I pray, it begins to come alive for you.

- First of all, Torah, the first five books of the Bible, of which Exodus is the second, reflects the coming together of a nation. It is an establishing time, not an established time. The book of Genesis is what comes before the birth of Israel. Exodus is the rather terrifying, wobbly start to the life of the People of God. They are discovering their values. They are beginning the living of them. The formation of Israel included the stewardship of both slavery and freedom. Psalm 137 which I just read, comes after Israel has been established. They know what they are losing. We can spot the values of our Jewish-Christian roots in the text. There is strength, hope, perseverance, cooperation, wisdom, openness to a greater vision and a network of activity that can only speak to the Spirit of God at work.
- Another point I loved hearing from the rabbis was that Miriam, the older sister of Moses, had to first convince her parents to have sex in order to conceive her baby brother. The hopelessness created by the edict that all baby boys be killed had so decimated any sense of a future for the Hebrew

people, that they stopped having sex. The girl-child bears the hope and sees to it that it is embodied!

- And notice the systemic threads. We always want to make God linear. God is not linear. God is a systems God. Notice, for example, the collaboration of opposites; oppressor and oppressed, the powerful and the powerless; Egyptians and Hebrews working together toward a vision of God they cannot yet see. And in our story, it is all women. They bring salvation to bear; so much for the suppression of feminine power.

What are the Godly values you see here? How do they inspire you in your own Christian life? Your congregational life? How are we inspired as a diocese?

It is a rub, a conflict with our values, and an awareness of injustice, that helps us be brave for change. That realization and the act of change can take a while. We Christians call it salvation history. It is filled with creative and generative tension, and we are always somewhere in the middle of it. We can feel powerless, indifferent, detached, small, and inadequate in the face of it; as though the challenges are too great. But we are not powerless. We can be brave in the midst of the most insurmountable problems. Our story today emboldens us to be subversive plotters for the glory of God.

As our values become more established, they call us to greater things

We are a Values Driven Organization. Our diocesan values are good, challenging and worthy of our exploration. They will shape us. At our board meetings we have been considering our values. We have thought about the budget, for instance, through the lens of our values. Which line items reflect Christ-

centeredness? Reconciliation? Passion? Innovation and Creativity? Integrity? How are those balanced? Have we got that right? Sometimes we are rubbed to discomfort. That is good. It helps us create a mission-driven budget instead of a budget-driven mission. We will do more of our work through the lens of our values, more deeply establishing, embodying them in our work as diocese. I invite you to look through the lens of your congregational values in the same way.

Our missio-mercials this year reflect how our diocesan values are being lived out day to day in our congregations. We have lived our values through our strategic plan and accomplished much.

What does it mean for us to continue being a Values-Driven Organization?

It is, in fact, time for an update to the plan; a “remix” if you will. In 2016 diocesan leaders will come to you at the deanery meetings with a new iteration of our strategic plan. This is sooner than I thought we would re-work our plan. So if this feels a bit sudden to you, please know, it felt a little sudden to me too! But it was clear that we were being called in a new direction, and the time was now.

To recap, we began our strategic planning process in 2011 with the idea that we would just keep it rolling. It is the way it is done these days. The days of five- or ten-year plans have ended. We always knew that in our plan there were things that could be accomplished and finished, such as moving to Sargent House. There would be others that would be ongoing, such as multi-cultural and inter-generational growth. We have done very well accomplishing many of the goals of the plan, letting go of things that were not a good fit, and creatively thinking forward.

We are moving ahead as we live our part of God's salvation history

The timing of the re-mix was spurred on by the results of our feasibility study late in June. You may recall that under "Building Leadership for the Future" we would seek to create an endowment for clergy wellness cost. The feasibility study, however, reflected back to us that we would not be able to raise the 15 million dollars it would take to create the endowment. Indeed, it was a very big goal; maybe too big for a diocese our size. But dreaming big is part of learning to imagine that the impossible can happen.

The feasibility results reflected some very encouraging things about our diocesan stewardship capacity - and importantly- called the diocesan leadership immediately back into discernment over the summer. We answered. The Council of Advice, and our Budget Advisory Committee worked hard to consider our dreams and our needs, our finances, our future funding, and how we could accomplish what we discern our calling to be.

There were some wonderful insights and thanksgivings that we celebrated, including that we are a diocese with a future, that there is no emergency, we are stable, motivated to keep growing in every way, and equipped to be creative and innovative in our next steps of living faithfully as the body of Christ.

We have taken the "remix" we discerned over the summer of the original strategic plan to the Board and the Standing Committee who last month joined the process of dreaming about our future. We have more work to do before it moves out for the consideration of the wider diocese which is why we are not voting on anything at this convention regarding the plan or what is required to

make it happen. Ken Wratten will share a bit more with you during the Budget Report.

The 2016 deanery meetings will be your opportunity to join the process once it has been properly prepared for your consideration. We will vote on it at the next convention. That said, your diocesan leaders, including the Council of Advice, which supports our fundraising efforts such as the Bishop's Appeal, will keep moving forward. You can expect as part of the plan news of an ongoing Bishop's Appeal, and a three year narrative budget that, as comprehensively as we are able, can take into account the future vision so we can work through how we are going to fund it should we choose to take on a greater vision and greater goals. This is a responsible way forward toward creating a sustainable, vibrant, values-driven future which we pray will glorify God in all we do.

The process of planning and of budgeting must have as much integrity as the goals themselves

This process is in keeping with our values and with the decision-making process we have used in our diocese for the last eight years. Diocesan Committees have brought no action for this convention regarding the changes in the budgeting process or the plan, because you have not had time to consider it. The process in this diocese has been that leadership collaborates on a plan and a strategy to fulfill it, the wider diocese refines the plan and the strategy, and then we vote on it. Everyone gets a chance to be part of the process. And that takes time. The Board, Standing Committee, Council of Advice and our Budget Advisory Committee are working now to have that prepared for the 2016 deanery meetings. The Board of Trustees has sought to tend to the immediacy of our

diocesan ministry and also remain disciplined about the process that works so well for us as a diocese. We hope we will have accomplished that.

As always, I am blessed to be your bishop. Next Tuesday I will begin the ninth year of my episcopate. I will celebrate in New Zealand where I will be taking a month's vacation. Pray for me and for Katie, who will meet me there, but who is right now diving on the Great Barrier Reef! A dream she and her father had. Pray for Dorian too. He must stay home but is doing well living his path.

Let us move now into our Lectio Divina where I pray we will be inspired by the strong values and identity of the Hebrew people. Let us ponder what it means to be a people for whom God has a values-driven future. Let us be brave and open ourselves to the ways God is calling us to live even more deeply into that vision which God dreams for us.

Amen.