

## Anglican Church in America General Synod September 2011

“For Such a Time as This”

“What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed...I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth...” I Cor. 3:5-6...”For we are God’s fellow workers.” I Cor. 3:9

Presiding Bishop Brian Marsh, Bishop Langberg, Bishop Strawn, Bishop Williams, Vicar General Fr. John Vaughan and all priests, deacons and laity assembled here this evening, I bring greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ from the Anglican Province of America on behalf of myself, Bishop Larry Shaver, Bishop Chandler Jones, Vicar General of the West, Fr. Walt Crites and Archdeacon and Canonist Fr. Erich Zwingert and my wife Dr. Mary Grundorf. I am pleased and honored to be invited to speak at this Synod celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Anglican Church in America. While my message this evening is serious, I will be begin with a story about “fellow workers” gone astray! A couple of continuing Anglican priests...

Now on a more serious note, all of you here are painfully aware of the recent disruption caused by the separation of some of your fellow members of the ACA wishing to depart and become part of the Roman Ordinariate. Despite the promises that it would be done with charity and brotherly kindness, the reality is-- it does not always play out that way. There have been unkind words spoken and hurtful actions taken that injure and damage individuals and in the process the witness of the Church. The APA went through a similar experience when a significant portion of our Diocese of the West left us several years ago for the ACNA. I pray that this Synod will be the beginning of a healing process for those who wish the Traditional Anglican witness to continue and that the future might be one that brings a greater degree of unity. The good news is we of the ACA and APA have taken a first step in that direction and I pray that the Holy Spirit will continue to encourage and guide us as we move forward together.

In light of the developing relationship between the Anglican Church in America and the Anglican Province of America, I want to share some thoughts with you from the I Corinthians passage which I read this evening. We have begun the process of attempting to bring together fellow Traditional Anglican Christians for the witness of the Gospel, “for such a time as this.” For too long, there has been rivalry in the Church which does not honor our Lord and the Gospel, whom we seek to preach and represent. The time has come in these days of growing apostasy within the established churches, and the growing threat of militant Islam globally, for those who take a strong stand for the Faith once delivered to the Saints, to come together and proclaim this from the mountain top. We must not hide away in our holy huddles, divide up in our spiritual ghettos, but declare without fear and hesitation that we believe that the ultimate victory is secured by our Resurrected Lord. We must transcend those artificial barriers which keep us separated, for fear of change, and become the Church not just a “movement.” The hour has come, the time has arrived, to put away from us that which keeps us separated, and let the world know that we mean business for the Lord and his Kingdom. Someone commented to me, it seems that we get together and experience positive feelings for each other, then forget...and nothing happens. Let this not be one of those times. I am reminded of the words of Rick Warren the author of Purpose Driven Life, who noted in a seminar, people forget 90% of what they hear and experience...(People excitedly visiting church and promising to return...) Remembering even important things is sometimes difficult. Clergy are expected to have perfect memories especially the bishop. How often we are confronted by someone whose name we should know well and we draw a blank. I have learned to love name tags.

Jurisdictional barriers are not anything new in the church; fact is we learn from the referenced scripture that it started in the early days of the infant Church. Partisanship began developing very early on in the church, and this demon discord has been with us down through the ages. Divisions among like-minded

Christians of the same or similar tradition have developed not just over theological issues but sadly over the cult of personality. "I'm of Peter, I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos." The Corinthian Church offers us interesting insights into the human personality and the reason why the church so often fails to develop and enter into the fullness of Spiritual experience. In the earlier verses of this book, Paul takes his readers to the mountain top of possibilities for those who are faithful Disciples of Christ, much as Jesus did with Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Paul tells them there are two main reasons for their lack of Christian growth as a Church. First, they are worldly-minded men of the flesh and the proof of his charge is that there is a spirit of partisanship among them; there was lack of consideration for one another, jealousy and most of all lack of humility. Each one, each faction felt they must have their way. "For there is jealousy and strife among you-- Are you not of the flesh, and behaving like ordinary men?" (Sound familiar?) Secondly, their reason for failure is that they are spiritually immature; they are showing few signs of growth. "I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but...as babes in Christ." In other words they were unable to move on the digest the more solid food of Christian faith and teaching. I believe that all of us here have come to the point and are prepared to move on to more solid food.

The partisans had grouped themselves around the personalities of Peter, Apollos and Paul and probably some others as well. In our 21<sup>st</sup> century partisanship, among traditional Anglicans, our divisions go to, I'm an Anglo-Catholic, or I'm an Evangelical, or I'm of the Prayer Book or I'm of the Missal, I'm a High Churchman or I'm a Low Churchman. I'm of the ACC or the PCK or the ACA or the APA and so on. All of this talk tends to separate us and categorize us into factions. Often overlooked in all this is the comprehensiveness of our Anglican heritage and its expression of the Christian Faith and how it allows for varying degrees of diversity. But most of all, we miss the most important virtue which is the beating heart of the Church, that is, Christian Love.

Paul and no doubt Apollos and others, had wanted that the messenger be merged with the message; that the Glory should go to God, that the vision of the living God should not be overshadowed by his agents, no matter how gifted or impressive their speaking ability or appearance they may be. Partisanship has a way of reversing that order, and the result can be separation, spiritual confusion and hindering of the witness to the things of Faith. I was recently in a home of one our priests talking about his parish and the growth that they had experienced. He told me of a person in the parish who said to him the other day, that if he should ever leave that parish or if anything ever happened to him she would probably leave the church. He chuckled about this, and I had to remind him, if people become so dependent upon you individually as a priest, while it may boost your ego, you are doing them a disservice because no one should be that dependent upon the personality of a certain priest. No member should ever equate the church with any man because in so doing he is obscuring or standing in the way of our Lord. And, is it not ego that has led to the unnecessary estranged relationship between the APA and the ACA? So, this problem exists on all levels of the church.

On one occasion in Lystra, following Paul and Barnabas preaching and healing a crippled man, the people wanted to pay the apostles divine honors, but they would have nothing to do with this. They were ministers of Christ, as his ambassadors, as representatives pointing away from themselves to him who was and is the source of their message. So it is with the situation in Corinth as Paul sees it, "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed as the Lord assigned to each." They are trustees of the Gospel. It is the Gospel that matters. Do not misunderstand, the messenger is not merely incidental; he is necessary. Yet no one must confuse the means with the end. "But just as we have been approved to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts." (1 Thess. 2:4) Going along with this thought, Paul uses two vivid metaphors to emphasize his points and to underline a grave warning about factions. The pictures he paints have timeless value. He represents a Christian Community as a garden that one pastor or priest may plant and another may water,

but the true source of its beauty and vitality is God. There is little difference between planter and the one who tends the garden; they will be rewarded according to their labor; but God who employs them is the one who is ultimately responsible both for the garden and its usefulness and beauty. "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave growth." I must not leave out my Texas friend, Bishop Strawn... If Paul had been using this metaphor and he lived in Texas he would have had a real problem particularly when referring to watering the garden. It is so dry in Texas...

Finally, had Paul drawn the garden metaphor a little further, he might have added, and he probably had it in mind, and the thought is valid, that a garden would not be very interesting if all it had were one kind of fruit or vegetable. The beauty of our Anglican heritage is its variety which is often limited by our unwillingness and lack of imagination to be open to other expressions. In my experience, I have found that we are no longer just white Anglo-Saxons, who use the 1928 Prayer Book. We have in the last 15-20 years been blessed by having large influxes of Anglicans from the Caribbean and Africa. Like our APA affiliated Anglican Churches in South India and the Philippines, they bring with them their own Anglican expressions and a lively and vital faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. They bring with them a musical tradition which is not the 1940 Episcopal Hymnal but that which is from their own culture. We, of the traditional Anglican Churches must make room for this in the church as we come together and unify in the faith and benefit from the spiritually that is brought to us from each other and from other Anglican cultures. There is plenty of room in God's great plan for every type of personality, and gift and institution and variation of expression in our Anglican tradition and for every type of gardener. But let it be one garden, planted by God, whose Spirit sustains its life. And may I add – this is not something to be put off to a better day or time – The kingdom of God is now! There was a young man, and some of you can identify with this, who had earned his household reputation for being "the messiest person in the family." Getting him to clean his room had become the impossible dream of his mother and father. Now and then he would go through the motions of tidying up a bit, but he never really got around to doing a thorough job of it. After graduating High School, he joined the Marine Corp. When he came home on leave after basic training, his father asked him what he had learned so far. "Well, Dad," he said, "I learned what „NOW!" means." Perhaps, we in our own ecumenical efforts as seemingly small as they are, could help bring to reality the call to fulfill God's purpose, "...as fellow workers with God..." "for such a time as this."