

THE BISHOP'S CHARGE TO THE 175TH SYNOD OF THE DIOCESE OF HURON

PENTECOST 2016

God's people of Huron:

"Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (1Cor 1.3)

Welcome each and every one of you to this 175th gathering of the Synod of Huron. We have travelled from the four directions to be together in Christ. Welcome Tobermory from the tip of the Bruce in the north. Welcome Pelee Island located in the midst of Erie in the south. Welcome Port Dover and Six Nations of the Grand River in the east where the sun rises. Welcome Amherstburg and Sandwich in the west where the sun sets. To all the communities of Huron embraced by the four directions; welcome. On this Feast of Pentecost we gather in our historic Cathedral as God's-people-in-Christ and in the love of the Holy Spirit to praise the One who is the hope of our salvation. Our prime directive as Synod-gathered is to discern and be attuned to the Creator's Will for us both in our particular time and within our unique context. May God bless our time together.

This is my eighth and final Charge as your Diocesan Bishop. As I suspect you well know, I have announced my intention to retire this fall after some forty-two years of ordained ministry. Given that approaching reality, I find myself in a strange season of transition as I prepare to pass the mantle of episcopal responsibility to our thirteenth diocesan bishop; Linda Nicholls. What apt image might capture this passing of the torch? Bishop Terry in his imitable way suggested that Elijah's passing of the prophetic mantle to Elisha in 2 Kings might be useful. Remember the story: it's both dramatic and impressive.

- Old Elijah takes his mantle, rolls it up and strikes the waters of the Jordan.
- The waters part and they pass through on dry land (reminiscent of the Exodus)
- Elisha asks for a double share of Elijah's spirit before he departs
- Elijah responds: "If you see me as I am taken from you, it will be granted."(2:10.b)
- And then comes the dramatic exit:
 - Chariots of fire and horses of fire/Elijah ascending into heaven in a whirlwind
- Elisha picks up Elijah's mantle, strikes the Jordan, the waters part and he passes through.
- Mantle passed – all is good.

As dramatic as this prophetic transition is; Linda and I are not Elisha and Elijah (nor would we want to be). A more appropriate image in this year of the Rio Olympics might be the relay race. Here we have Bob passing the baton on to Linda. As I slowdown from full speed, she runs alongside, carefully takes the baton and accelerates to full speed. Mantle passed – all is good.

Bishop Linda will be with us tomorrow but is unable, because of prior commitments, to join us either tonight or Tuesday. She also finds herself in a season of transition as she begins episcopal ministry in Huron; a place that is essentially new for her. I am confident that you will welcome, love, and support her in the same manner you did for Bishop Terry and me. I have said this often because I think it bears repeating. We are blessed beyond measure to have Linda as our bishop coadjutor to lead us through both the joys and challenge of our future.

The Bishops' Charge is in two sections this year which reflect our 'betwixt and between' time. The first section is tonight as I offer my reflection as the outgoing bishop. Tomorrow first thing, Bishop Linda will cast her initial vision of the way forward. In preparation for tonight's address, I perused prior Charges in the hope of detecting ongoing themes that might reflect my passion as your bishop. They weren't difficult to find and might actually be obvious for all of us. I said this in 2013:

"It seems to me that the Christian lifestyle to which we are called can be summarized using the Baptismal Covenant on the one hand and the Anglican Communion's Marks of Mission on the other. Rooted in the Triune experience of God, the Baptismal Covenant challenges us to live missionally: to be God's 'sent' people. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has his imitable clearheaded way of reminding us what it really means to live faithfully when he wrote this: "We learn from the Bible that God is a God who takes sides. He is not neutral. God is a God who is always on the side of the poor the oppressed, the little ones who are despised; and it is for this reason that we, his church, have got to be in solidarity with the poor, the homeless, the hungry and the oppressed." The Marks of Mission also detail just what living as God's 'sent' people might look like. The Marks are well known to us; in fact they have become a sort of missional mantra for contemporary Anglicans. (to proclaim God's Good News/to teach, baptize, and nurture new (and all) believers/to respond to human need by loving service/to oppose injustice, violence of every kind, and pursue peace and reconciliation/to care for the creation)

The Lambeth Conference of 2008 was a defining moment of my episcopate and I suspect for most of the bishops who attended. The theme of our time together at Canterbury was: *Equipping Bishops for Mission*. Here is how we summarized our understanding of God's Mission (from 2009 Charge) "God's Mission is holistic; its orientation is toward the redemption of the whole of creation. For Anglicans, indeed the whole Church, the Gospel is not just the proclamation of individual redemption and renewal, but the renewal of society under the reign of God: the ending of injustice and the restoration of right relationship with God and between human beings and creation. The Gospel given to us by Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth demands our commitment to the poor, the marginalized, the exploited, the refugees, indigenous peoples, the internally displaced, and victims of war, terror and natural disaster."

Another recurring theme over the years is rooted in the first two Marks of Mission (to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom/to teach, baptize and nurture new and already believers). We can't be faithful to the remaining three Marks if we are not grounded in the first two. You have to say 'Amen' to God's call to be in Holy Relationship. I said this in 2009: "God's love affair with humankind begins at creation. The ancient elders recount that at the beginning of all things God acted. Over the face of the dark and formless void, a wind/Spirit from God swept over the face of the waters and God's Spirit brought forth new life. (Genesis 1.1-2) In response to the act of creation, God sang a most beautiful canticle of joy: "and God saw that it was good". (Genesis 1.10b) The salvation narrative, from its murky beginnings thru to the glorious vision of the New Jerusalem, reveals an unshakable constant. God is utterly loving, faithful and unceasingly invites us into deep relationship. 'I will be your God and you will be my people'. This clarion call of the Creator invites us to respond in kind."

I returned to this theme of giving our 'Amen' to God's invitation to be relationship in 2014 when I said this to Synod. "This evening's text from the Hebrew Scriptures is also about making choices. Nearing the end of his life, old Joshua gathers Israel together at Shechem. His purpose is to recount the community's tumultuous salvation history, to affirm God's abiding faithfulness and to challenge the people to respond and make covenant, He then issues the challenge of all challenges: "...choose this day whom you will serve...(Joshua 24.15b) His response is clear: "...but as for me and my household(my

community) we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24.15b) The community that is Israel rises to his challenge: "Therefore we will also serve the Lord, for he is our God" (Joshua 24.18b) Israel's response at Shechem resonates for us these many years later. Each day we also are to make choices: serve the Lord or not. (I want to follow Jesus. We want to follow Jesus.) And when we make our choice and say yes, we are always driven into community; a community whose life and health is framed by another covenant- the baptismal Covenant. First we choose to embrace the triune God. (I believe in God: Creator/ I believe in Jesus: Redeemer/I believe in Holy Spirit: Sanctifier) Then we covenant to choose a Christian lifestyle. (continuing in the apostles teaching and fellowship, the breaking of the bread and prayers/when we wander away, we return to faith by the Grace of God/we strive to be gospel people by word and example/we strive to seek and serve Christ in all persons loving neighbour as self/we strive to be justice and peacemakers/we strive to sustain and renew the life and health of this fragile earth, our island home.) Strengthened and uplifted by the Holy Spirit, we are proud Gospel people "in our hearts sanctifying Christ as Lord and always ready to make our defence to anyone who demands from us an account of the hope that it is in us." (1 Peter 3.15 slightly re-worked)"

If you remember last year's Synod, we focused on the last mark of mission (to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth). I attempted to set the stage with these words from the bishops gathered at Lambeth in 2008 "Indigenous peoples have traditional understandings of the earth as a gift of the Creator and of their relationship to it and its creatures being one of interconnectedness and responsible caring. The indigenous people have reminded us that we are not aliens in a wilderness to be conquered, but integral parts of the created order, as are plants and animals, which are to be cherished and nurtured." I also quoted from the Communique issued by bishops gathered in South Africa. "In different ways each of our own dioceses are deeply impacted by climate injustice and environmental degradation. We accept the evidence of science concerning the contribution of human activity to the climate crisis and the disproportionate role played by fossil-fuel based economies. We believe the problem is spiritual as well as economic, scientific and political. For this reason the church must urgently find its collective moral voice".

The theme for this year's Synod is congruent with those of our recent past. Grounded in the experience of Pentecost, we are challenged to reflect personally and corporately about what it means to be God's 'sent' people in the seeming maelstrom of 2016. Here's how I framed this dynamic a few years ago. "Since first beginnings, the Christian Community has had a love/hate ... on/off ... come close/stay away relationship with the culture. In fact our particular time presents us with a multitude of unique challenges. In the world of 'selfies', 'me-ism', relativism. Nimby-ism, Facebook, texting, Twitter and the like. In such a world the challenge for Christians is to embrace a healthy individuated sense of community, one that is NOT synonymous with local, myopic, inward, selfish, or silo-building. At our best I think Anglican Christians belong to a 'community of communities'. At every level and iteration, we gather 'in Christ' to be sent out 'in Christ'.

In tonight's reading from John, Jesus offers gifts that enable us to be equal to the task of being a missional (sent) people; gifts that only have to be received.

"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." (John 14)

(Holy Spirit-Holy Peace.) The Acts reading describes that marvellous experience of birthing, when as at the beginning of all things, the Wind/Spirit of the Creator moved over the face of creation and a Community (The Way) was born. Just as Jesus promised, Holy Gifts were given and received. The much loved verse from Micah, which frames our Synod experience this year, answers a most critical question: what does post-Pentecost living look like? Surely the community's life must always be multi-faceted and

multi-layered (think baptismal covenant, think Marks of Mission) and surely the community's life must resonate with the words of Micah reaching down through the ages to speak to us tonight:

**"...and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"**

To enable us to be equal to the task of living into Micah's challenge, we are going to focus on three issues that I suspect weigh on all our hearts at this time.

- The world-wide refugee crisis
- What does a faithful response to walk with First Nations people actually look like?
- Strengthening and deepening our ongoing partnership with our sisters and brothers in Amazonia

To aid us in our quest, we welcome to Synod

- 1) Archdeacon Stephen Haig and the Huron Refugee Committee
- 2) Bishop Mark MacDonald(NAIB) and the Huron Bridge Builder's Group
- 3) The Reverend Marcos and Lourdes Barros from Brazil (It is our hope that Bishop Saulo, Ruth and son Thomas will join us this summer)

So the life of our 175th Synod lies before us. As I mentioned previously, this last Charge is more a personal rumination of our time together; a reflection of one who is in transition. Tomorrow, our soon-to-be new diocesan bishop will pick up the baton and cast her vision of the future that might lie ahead. Mantle passed – all is good.

Each year at this particular moment in the giving of the Charge, I always gaze out over the assembled community and what do I see: friends, colleagues-in-ministry and above all fellow sojourners on the Way. Thank you for being you, for being here, and being God's faithful-in-Christ. The last words for this my last Charge comes from the Scriptures:

*"I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus
and your love toward all the saints,
and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you
as I remember you in my prayers.
I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all glory
may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him,
So that with the eyes of hearts enlightened
you may know the hope to which he has called you,
what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints."*

(Ephesian 1:15-18)

AMEN