

I Came to Serve and not to Be Served

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." [Mark 10:45]

Getting the Gospel Straight

There are so many versions of the Gospel today that tend to diminish, if not destroy, why Jesus came and what his mission was for the world, bringing the confusion and diversity of message that we now have. The opening verse to this paper is reiterated many many times in the Christian Scriptures:

- "the son of man" - a Perfect example for every human being
- "did not come to be served" - came as a Servant and not a ruler
- Jesus came "to serve" - an example for God's love for all people, in all times, and in all places
- "to give his life as a ransom" [ransom - the act of freeing from captivity or punishment]
 - to live a life of complete dedication as an example to demonstrate Freedom, now and forever

The Gospel of Jesus is simple and to the point. Religion complicates it and Traditionalism [traditionalism - adherence to tradition (especially in cultural or religious matters)] captivates and obligates us to beliefs, rules, and regulation that bind and punish. In Easton's Bible Dictionary we are told this about the word, [*Gospel* — a word of Anglo-Saxon origin, and meaning "God's spell", i.e., word of God, or rather, according to others, "good spell", i.e., good news. It is the rendering of the Greek evangelion, i.e., "good message."] To keep the message of the Gospel simple we might break it down to three words:

- **WAY:**

The "way" of the gospel is conveying a good message in word and deed. It is best heard when both word and deed coordinate together to exemplify the message. The Gospels in the Christian scriptures demonstrate this by telling us what Jesus said and did. The Kingdom or Realm of God, which Jesus brought to us, announced and displayed the way of God's intention for caring and living in this world. Jesus is the word and verb, the statement and the action, of this good news living with love and peace together with all creation. The invitation of Jesus was always "follow me" and never worship me. He was born a Jew and he died as a Jew (something that many Christians often forget) and, as a Rabbi, it was never his intention to start a new religion or "way" apart from Torah.

- **TRUTH:**

The simple "truth" of the Gospel is probably recorded in a prayer that Jesus was said to have taught, generally referred to as "the Lord's prayer".

The prayer begins with God (Father) in heaven - [heaven - any place of complete bliss and delight and peace] - a metaphor for the source of all that is and the way it might be.

Hallowed be your name is an exclamation of worship and gratitude for this inexplicable source of life in all its fullness. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven is as clear and simple as it gets. The essence of true worship and gratitude is to enable the Realm of God to continually function in our lives

Give us this day our daily bread conveys our continuing need for complete sustenance and all our basics and essential needs for life.

Forgive us our sins and we forgive those who sin against us is probably the proficient advice for living in peace with each other. It is also one of the most difficult things to accomplish if one is not ready and willing to become a fully active participant in the Realm of God. It goes along with the fact that "to whom much is given, much will be required". Until we understand the grace of forgiving others we are prone to lose out on the peace of forgiveness in our own lives.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil is the fulfillment and gift of maturity. When prayer become a way of life and not just an action of petitioning for our wants and desires, we have

grown to respect the will and essence of the Realm of God. Prayer for me is, **Perusing Reasonable Alternatives Yet Expecting Resolve**. Seeking rational and reasonable alternatives that benefit our world and all who live in it will surely have the probability for resolution.

- **LIFE:**

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life". [John 5:24]

Anyone who:

- hears what Jesus said
- believes in the one who sent him - believes in God
- has eternal life [eternal life - life without beginning or end]
- will not be judged, and
- has crossed over from death to life

When anyone sees and desires to be a part of the way of God, when the truth of "the Lord's" prayer becomes their daily practice, then they have crossed over from death to life the way it was meant to always be. Perhaps this is what the Apostle Paul meant when he suggests that we "pray without ceasing"?

This, to me, is the simple outline of the Gospel when it is not complicated by religion or encumbered by traditions of human origin. God's promise of eternal life is a free gift to all people, everywhere, in all times to be freely received. Rules, regulation, doctrines, disciplines, clauses or conditions of any kind are ungodly and unnecessary. A true gift comes with no strings attached and, when this gift is received, we become a new creation having crossed over from death to life.

Serving Others:

If we, who call ourselves Christian, can join with others to agree that there is good news in Way, Truth, and Life imploring us to serve, then there might be a further understanding that this is best done in concert with others to be most effective. The word service, by definition, forces us to think beyond the individual. From the beginning of human history we see our ancestors gathering in various ways trying to benefit the common good.

Unfortunately such gathering also created groups that became hostile to each other in warring destruction. In spite of this madness, there has been a clarion call to encourage a more constructive and peaceful coexistence. The greater sadness is that religious groups also developed and became involved, not in serving the common good, but as instigators of hatred and violence. A fervent and exclusive belief that their God was superior instigated cleansing the world of anyone who was not alleged to their traditions and their God. It seems that such pride not only goes before a fall but it also causes extreme violence.

While we have come a long way in our history as a people, we still have great tension among us that, too often, breaks out in serious destruction. Even with our modern systems of global communications, a recognition and understanding of the inherent diversity is seriously lacking. Throughout our shrinking world, we continue to struggle with living together in serving the common good. How long will it take humanity to value our diversity and acknowledge the tremendous benefit it has brought us? Uniformity is deadly and sterile. With mutual respect and appreciation for unity in our diversity we may solve the problem.

The Real purpose of the Parish

To me the basic purpose of the parish church is **Welcome and Hospitality**. In the dictionary: [*welcome - giving pleasure or satisfaction or received with pleasure or freely granted*] - - [*hospitality - kindness in welcoming guests or strangers*]. The best statement I have found on hospitality was, "*Hospitality is not merely making*

space for somebody else, it's about letting people into your hearts and letting them change you" by The Rev. Canon Timothy Boggs, Washington National Cathedral. Welcome and hospitality are probably rare in most places because change is one of the most feared aspects of life. Most people actually try to resist change and newcomers inevitably bring differences into the group. Think about it, if we are to become followers of Jesus, how can we not imitate his openness and kindness toward others? Because of the importance of welcome and hospitality, I have several other articles should you wish to stop and learn more about these important words.

- <http://janddhealth.intuitwebsites.com/ArtWelcomeProblem.pdf>
- <http://janddhealth.intuitwebsites.com/ArtAllAreWelcome.pdf>

The next most important word is **Change**. Because everything in life is constantly changing we must learn to use change to our advantage. We should be well aware of the danger of neglecting change, especially in the church. Ignoring the need to change, most churches are caught in "traditionalism" because they try to hold on to tradition - the way it has always been done before. It is this lack of change that causes many of our churches to become weak and die. There are few if any people who can claim that they have never changed in body, mind, or spirit. Everything in the universe is growing and getting older and constantly changing. Your body alone must renew itself every day or you would soon decay and die much earlier. The earliest of Christian scripture in [Romans 12:2] tells us, *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is."* Be wary of "conforming" and look toward being "transformed" and renewed, especially by the presence of God that is alive and well.

There are probably many other words to describe the importance and definition of a parish church, but for this paper my last and equally important word is **Ministry**. Followers of Jesus certainly should be those who are apt to serve each other and the community around them and at large. Churches that are truly welcoming and hospitable and open to change have the greatest probability of having visitors stay and make themselves at home. The parish ministry begins with the new and old alike who make up the core group of the parish in worship, education, and ample small groups and functions that serve the needs of the diversity of the whole.

What are the basic elements for a church and its people in the 21st century?

Worship – gratitude for the gift of life and to offer our lives in service to others

Education – understanding the Scriptures and how they relate to the 21st century

Mission – to serve others with faithful commitment as followers of Jesus Christ

o Perhaps we should think of creative ways for each parish to participate locally in the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) in addition to cooperation with our national church and the rest of the world. More specifically, the 192 countries of the United Nations committed themselves by 2015 to:

- (1) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- (2) achieve universal primary education;
- (3) promote gender equality and empower women;
- (4) reduce child mortality;
- (5) improve maternal health;
- (6) reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- (7) ensure environmental sustainability;
- (8) and develop a global partnership for development.

These mission opportunities and more will need a new creativity of organization and function in our world as it grows in complexity of structure. It will take a team of savvy and knowledgeable people to navigate safely toward a new future. When you examine the IRS tax code for a 501(c) status you will see that there are 28 categories or levels from which to choose. The right code(s) will need to be selected to enable and encourage

the proper financial support from a variety of the many possible sources to assure IRS compliance for them and charity.

Ministry in the surrounding community - thinking out of the box:

<http://janddhealth.intuitwebsites.com/ArtServantChurch.pdf>

The Inclusiveness of the Episcopal Church

The Polity - [the form of government of a social organization] is ideally suited for today's church. The Episcopal Church is often referred to as the "Bridge Church" between the catholic and protestant viewpoints; a church that is not either/or but both/and an inclusive church, also known as via-media [a middle way between two extremes]. A diagram of the thinking and teaching of the Episcopal Church is often seen as a "three legged stool" with each leg representing Tradition, Scripture, and Reason. The leg of Tradition comes from the first century of Christianity right up to our present time with the claim of "Apostolic Succession" of our Bishops. The leg of Scripture and its importance is clear since we read four passages from the Bible - Hebrew, Psalms, Epistles, and Gospel - during our Sunday Eucharists. It is also well known that the King James Edition of the whole Bible, including the Deuterocanonicals/Apocrypha, was published in England. The leg of Reason came to the fore during the period the Enlightenment and the Reformation with the introduction of Science and the Printing Press that made it possible for so many more people to read and think for themselves.

Our Canon Laws are also brief and to the point, contained in one volume. They are concerned basically with how we gather together as churches and dioceses and function together in conventions with clergy and laity both included by elected representatives. Our Catechism defines the ministry of the Episcopal Church giving answer to, "Who are the ministers of the Church? The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons." Our Baptismal Covenant, including the Apostle's Creed with other important covenantal intentions in the form of questions like:

- Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? - I will with God's help.
- Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? - I will with God's help.
- Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being? - I will with God's help.

In these and many other ways there is a deliberate notion of hospitality and welcome to all people in establishing our need to be aware of and respect the diversity of body, mind, and spirit that come to join or befriend our church community.

As followers of Jesus we must remain focused

These three words, welcome, change, and ministry, may help us to keep focused on the meaning and worth of our parishes and what all of the people who make up a parish can and should do to serve in the name of Christ. In a new book, published by the Episcopal Church Foundation in 2010 called, *"Beyond the Baptismal Covenant: Transformational Lay Leadership for the Episcopal Church in the 21st Century"*, I end with this remark (pg. 69) from our Presiding Bishop, The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, *"that rather than wanting to know how many people attend service on a Sunday, she would rather know how many lives were transformed"*. This small book talks about transformational congregations of every size that make a difference in our world.

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God's love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.