

Sermon, 9:15 a.m., Sunday, May 17, 2009

I have so much to say to you. I've got a lot to talk to you about, and there's so little time to do that. Let me try and share with you some thoughts and experiences I've had over the last couple of weeks, and let's see where we go to. It might be "End of Part 1."

I've always wanted the church to kind of reflect, in a good way, in a positive way, what's important within our society. I think God is at work within the world. We say that by the mission statement of this cathedral: "Revealing God's presence in the world." God is at work in the world. Our job is to find God, to identify God and to join God in the mission that God has in this world.

There are things that I think you can see that in. I've always wanted a church to be kind of like Saturday Night Live — you know that? — maybe give away canned ham at the services to people. I think we're getting more and more like Saturday Night Live. You had the kind of stand-up comedy routine at the beginning of the service today. But I think we have a lot to learn. It really grab's people's attention.

Or the David Letterman Show. You know the David Letterman Show? David Letterman keeps his studio cold — some of you here at the cathedral can relate to that — so that people are more engaged, more vibrant in what's happening.

I went to see the movie Star Trek, the new movie Star Trek, last week. It's really good. If you're a Trekkie, you need to go and see it. I went with my son-in-law and another couple of young men. One of them was sitting next to me, and after it was over, he says: "Isn't it strange that everyone from Earth has a different accent, but everybody else in all of the universe has an American accent?" I thought that was a good point, because you've got Scotty and you've got the Russian and the Korean. Everybody has a different accent but in the universe.

I thought that that tied in with what we were saying this morning. There was a number of accents here, and everybody has an accent. We'll come back to that in a moment.

Jesus says something very radical in the Gospel this morning, and we might kind of just gloss over what he's calling us to be and to do. He talks about love. We're all in favour of love — right? It's a good thing to have. Let's all love one another. He also talks about friendship. Friendship's important. Friendship is important for us, and we would all agree with that. But what he is calling us to do in that love and friendship is to redefine who we are as people, and he is calling us as a community of faith to define ourselves, to shape ourselves and to form ourselves in relationship to the world through that love and that friendship.

There are two people that I've been reading lately and I encourage you to read, because I think they bring different perspectives but perspectives about the same idea of friendship within the church. One is a woman called Mary Hunt, who talks about "fierce tenderness" — fierce tenderness — and the other is a woman whose name is Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, who has written a book called *Rediscovering Friendship*. What they say is let's kind of step back from all the stuff that's in the church about Jesus, and let's focus on what Jesus calls us to be as friends — as friends with him and as friends with one another.

That, on the outside, seems to be an easy thing to do, but remember Jesus was called a friend of tax collectors and sinners. There's a story of a rabbi who went to a clergy in the Presbyterian church and said to him: "What is the unforgivable sin?" He gave a theological point of view that the unforgivable sin is a sin against the Holy Spirit. The rabbi said: "No, no, no, no. The unforgivable sin is when an Arab says to a Jew, 'You are my friend'; or in Northern Ireland when a Catholic says to a Protestant, 'You are my friend'; or when a Muslim says to a Hindu: 'You are my friend.'" For the major bulk of the community which they come from, they come with history and with baggage. For them, that's unforgivable that they should do that, that they should call those on the other side friends.

Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel says that we have mixed up enemies. Christians have no enemies, Christians have strangers, and the call for us is to come into a relationship, a friendship, with those who are strangers to us.

Now, if God is at work in our world, which we believe, then we should be open to God revealing to us new ways of being as individuals and new ways of being as a community. I came back, as you know, a couple of weeks ago from Salt Lake City. I experienced, along with the other deans, the Church of the Latter Day Saints. Now, let me say something first of all. The people who belong to the Church of the Latter Day Saints are really nice people. They're lovely people. In themselves they are lovely people. What I question is the institution, the governance, the religious model that they use as a community.

Many of us left after spending a day with them, after hearing them talking about things like family, after hearing them talk about things like outreach, after hearing them talking about things like development, and we all left saying, "There's something wrong here; there's something wrong here," because we discovered there a structure, religious structure and even a political structure, that controls people, and people do not have the freedom to think, to challenge. Oh, yes, sure, they do, but once you challenge, you're outside the theology, and your eternal salvation is a risk.

That's something we've heard, believe it or not, friends, within the Anglican Church of Canada lately. "If you remain in the Anglican Church of Canada," Anglicans sitting in pews have been told, "your eternal salvation is at risk." Here in this city Anglicans have been told that. And it's time for us as the Anglican

Church of Canada to deal with some issues: to deal with the issue of the ongoing revelation of God — we don't believe that in the same way as the Mormons do, but we believe that God still reveals God's self in the world and so shapes us and forms us as a community of faith; to deal with justice, because if we don't deal with issues of justice, we're not being a community that Jesus wants us to deal with; and to deal with truth. What is truth? — the great question of the New Testament. Do we have truth, or do you have truth?

At the moment, the Anglican Network in Canada — there, I've named it — is saying that they have truth and the Anglican Church of Canada have moved out of truth, and it's important for us to really take a step back as Anglicans and continue on to struggle with that question. We should always ask ourselves that question. Have we moved away from truth? Have we moved away from justice?

When people see us acting and behaving as Anglican Christians in this city, how do they know that we are speaking the truth? What's the accent that God speaks with? The accent I believe God speaks with is inclusiveness, justice, radical welcome and a fierce tenderness to everyone.

We ask ourselves time and time again: why are we not growing? Why are we in many ways shrinking as a church? I think it has to do with the fact that we have not been honest with ourselves and not been honest with what God has called us to do. Who are our friends? There's not a list of those who are friends and those who are not friends. Jesus came into a culture and a society that talked about those who were in and those who were out. He came to turn that upside down, and by becoming friends with tax collectors and prostitutes and those who were marginalized by the religious and political people of his day, then he started to turn that upside down.

Jesus laid down his life long before they crucified him. They crucified him because he laid down his life. They crucified him because he was friends with people that were thought to be unacceptable within the society in which they lived.

Can we learn from society? Yes, we can learn from society, and we can say: "This is where we see God acting. This is God's accent of justice and love within our world, and our world is right." It's a call for us as Christians to say: "Society is right on this, and we have made a mistake."

It's time for us as the Anglican Church of Canada to deal with the issue, and to deal with the truth of the issue, and the issue is the presence of gay and lesbian people within our churches — not as enemies, not as second-class members and hopefully not even as strangers, but as friends; recognizing the gifts, the talents and recognizing the presence of God in their lives. Then I believe what the prophet Isaiah says: "Then your healing will be seen. Then you will shine as a light. Then people will come and worship with you — then."

So, my brothers and sisters, I am asking us to really come to terms with this issue and to take leadership as the cathedral within this diocese. I had an experience last week of being in Vancouver at Christ Church Cathedral. The tag line for Christ Church Cathedral is: "Open doors, open hearts, open minds." Open doors. Open doors is symbolic, I believe, is an outward and physical sign of having open minds and open hearts.

I received my degree at VST along with Peter Elliott. You know Peter, because Peter's been here. I was pleased and proud to receive that degree. Peter was granted a degree for his work in his diocese and the national church and his work overseas. I know Peter and Thomas well. They've been great supports for Marcia and I as we became part of this cathedral. They are two supporters and encouragers.

Peter Elliott preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he did that as a speaker last Monday evening. Thomas said to me afterwards: "At least you worked for your degree, Logan." I said: "Thomas, I think Peter worked for his degree as well."

It's time to stop. It's time to redirect ourselves. It's time to listen. It's time to listen to God's accent and deal with it, welcome, move on and be the church. I am asking you to prayerfully consider our leadership as this cathedral in this diocese and in the Anglican Church of Canada. Amen.