

I have been struggling with my General Convention report. I have started it three times, now. At first, I was going to give general impressions, then a detailed accounting. I believe I was supposed to wait until after this last Sunday, August 23. The scripture readings, the sermon and the very hymns spoke to me.

The first lesson was from Joshua. It is where Joshua is telling the Israelites that they need to put aside other gods and worship the One God. And the Israelites say they will, but Joshua knows better. He knows they will rebel, that they will forsake the Lord and worship foreign gods. And it brought me back the General Convention. There were many faithful people there, misguided, but faithful. They truly believe they are following the path the Lord has set for them. However, there were also many people who pay God and Jesus lip service, but don't really believe. They believe in THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH (TEC), the institution. And unfortunately, many of the leaders of TEC are in this second category. The Presiding Bishop herself, indicated that Jesus is only one way to God, directly contradicting John's Gospel, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). TEC is like Philip, later in that chapter of John or Thomas, after the resurrection, who if they cannot see, cannot believe.

Joshua asks the Israelites again who they will serve and again they insist they will serve the Lord. Joshua then indicates "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD". Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" Peter immediately answers, "Yes", but when Jesus keeps asking, Peter gets confused and argumentative. Why does Jesus keep asking – I already answered. God asks, "Do you love me?" Some in TEC seem to think that since they have answered once, they don't need to answer again, or submit to the Lord's will every day. They seem not to be willing to take up their cross and follow Jesus, because this would mean putting aside everything they want to do and to do what Jesus wants.

The second lesson, last Sunday, was from Ephesians and spoke of wives submitting to their husbands, and husbands loving their wives, just as Jesus loved the church – us. Jesus gave his life for us, washing with water through the word, making us clean and new. And we need to submit our will to Jesus. It is hard to do, and personally, I have to recommit every day, and confess that I have failed every night. But I try. I am not sure some of the people at General Convention understand the concept and if they do, they do not try. They can do things their way.

The Gospel, last Sunday, was the final week of John's "I am the bread of life" Gospels, reiterating that Jesus is the only way to eternal life. Directly contradicting many of the Presiding Bishops' statements at General Convention.

The final hymn we sang last Sunday was 525 – The Church's One Foundation. Now, we sang this at General Convention on the floor of the House of Deputies – it was indicated as the President of the House of Deputies, Bonnie Anderson's favorite hymn. However, I am not sure that everyone in that body really understands or believes the full first line: "The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord". I think they believe the Church's one foundation is... well, TEC/

On the floor of the House of Deputies, Jesus was hardly mentioned. There was a large bible, open on the dais, as required by the constitution and canons. But it was never read from or referred to. "GOD" was mentioned frequently, but never "GOD the Father". The Nicene Creed was skipped in every Episcopal Church communion service. (I usually attended an alternate service sponsored by the American Anglican Council – straight from the prayer book, and sermons from people I could see and hear and listen to). The Holy Spirit was brought up many times – "The Holy Spirit is calling me to do..." when ever someone wanted to validate their position. Perhaps, this is the only part of the Trinity we really need? I think we only said the Lord's Prayer because it is so ingrained.

It would seem that much of the Episcopal Church leadership just doesn't get it. Every resolution regarding repealing B033 (last convention's resolution to hold off on consecrating any additional

openly gay bishops) was routed to the World Mission Committee. Near the end of convention, when all of the resolutions from her committee had been addressed, the committee chair from the House of Deputies thanked the President of the House of Deputies and indicated how proud she was to be able to serve her (the president) and The Episcopal Church during this convention. And here I was, thinking that I was serving God first, then the Diocese of Albany.

As much as I might think about leaving the Episcopal Church and joining some other Anglican organization, I don't feel God calling me to do that. I feel God is calling us to be the voice in the wilderness. There are still people in the Episcopal Church who are faithful, misguided but faithful. There are pockets of conservative parishes in very liberal or even moderate dioceses, just as there are pockets of liberal parishes in our conservative diocese. I am commanded to love others as I would be loved. I don't have to condone their behavior and I can attempt to influence. I pray for the leaders of TEC, that they may reestablish, or establish for the first time, a relationship with Jesus. I feel that TEC is going in the wrong direction but just as I would not abandon my wayward child or parent, I cannot abandon TEC. Until they require that I do something that I feel is against scripture and against Jesus' plan for me, I need to try to work with them. Right now, I believe Jesus wants me right where I am. I don't know why, but I trust Him to guide me.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. " Psalm 46

"My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads."

Galatians 6:1-5

"Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith." **Galatians 6:7-10**

Respectively submitted: Debbie Fish, Lay Deputy, General Convention, 2009