

Sermon for Proper 15C ~ August 15, 2010
Trinity Episcopal Church in Lawrence, Kansas
The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

“Where do we go from here?” That’s a question people have been asking a lot lately. KU Athletics is asking that question in relation to the football season with a new coaching staff and conference and in relation to the basketball season with new players. Students entering the university for the first time are asking the question. People working on the problem of shelter for homeless persons in this community anticipating the winter months are asking it. You’ve been asking that most of the last year with regard to working with your interim, your search committee, and your vestry during the transition between rectors. , “Where do we go from here?”

Gay and I have certainly been asking ourselves that question. We’ve been trying to sell our house in Galveston. To facilitate that, Gay continued to teach in Texas. As you know, she has now retired and joined me permanently. Now that a new rector is on the way to Trinity, I hope my conversations with several bishops and deployment officers in this diocese and others will soon result in an assignment as an interim rector. In fact we have an interview this week in another state. But, we continue to ask, “Where do we go from here?”

As for Trinity, when your rector, Fr. Rob Baldwin, arrives, he will begin leading into a new future in mission. In order to prepare to call a settled rector, churches in transition need to spend some time doing five specific things: come to terms with your history, discover a new identity, allow changes in leadership, re-forge denominational links, and commit to a new ministry. You’ve been doing that during this year of transition. As the leaders of this community of faith know, completion of these developmental tasks during the interim period is necessary for the health and future of the parish and its relationship with the priest who is called. They have worked hard and deserve your gratitude for guiding you through the process to a successful conclusion. But what exactly will that look like? Nobody can say. “Where do we go from here?”

The question sort of jumps out at us from the pages of scripture this morning. For the Christian, life is a process of keeping and living by faith. That is the concern of today’s lessons. These are fiery words and they are not easy for us to hear because they are full of hard sayings, of demands for faithfulness, and of the promise of judgment. They are not our usual Sunday fare. No gentle Jesus, meek and mild, no easy yokes or light burdens, no kind words about love and forgiveness. This is the other side of the faith; the side we don’t embrace so willingly, the side that tells us that while life in Christ is God’s free gift, hanging onto it requires something of us. But there it is and it is very much a part of the complete message that God has been attempting to get across for so long. Jesus warns us that we ought to be at least as concerned about reading the signs of God’s presence and leadership in our lives as we are about reading the signs of the weather. For the Christian, life is a process of keeping and living by faith. “Where do we go from here?”

The answer is, “wherever we go, God is with us.” A way is being prepared and our job is to keep our eyes and ears open to recognize God’s hand at work. In a world where we can control and manipulate so many things, it is really a comfort to know that he is constantly fulfilling the covenant promise to be with us no matter what. The divine presence is not dependent upon our consciousness. It may be the one thing in the universe that is never “up to us.” It seems to me, from my vantage point on this last Sunday as your interim rector, that herein lies at least one important answer to the

question, "Where do we go from here?" Our job is to be alert to the signs of God's hand at work wherever we may be and to be witnesses of that sacred reality so that others may see and believe.

For Trinity and for the Pogue's and many others who are asking the question about next things, there is good news. God in Christ will be present and active in our lives each step along the way. This is the promise of resurrection and this is the hope that has given every generation of Christians the motivation they need to continue in Christ's work. As we take different paths, I am confident that God will lead us to the decisions and the places where we need to be to serve him. The challenge for each of us is to trust God enough to follow. It's a challenge because we hesitate to take risks, we resist leaving the familiar and the comfortable, we are willful and controlling, we too often substitute meetings for mission, we cling to the past and the way we've always done things, and our imaginations are seriously underutilized. That's where the Risen One comes in.

The eminent Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology, Carl Jung, discovered a statement to this effect among the Latin writings of Desiderius Erasmus. Erasmus, the Renaissance scholar and humanist, said the statement had been an ancient Spartan proverb. Jung popularized it, having it inscribed over the doorway of his Zurich home to remind those who entered that "awe of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalms 111:10). The phrase is also inscribed upon Dr. Jung's tomb. *Vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit.* (Bidden or not bidden, God is Present.)

We worship a God who shows up! There is no "activating" his presence. His presence with us is the result of the divine will. The primary meeting place for you as a congregation is when you gather week by week. It is helpful, because all of us need to be reminded of the meaning of our sacramental relationship with God in the Eucharistic Meal. We come here not to "activate" the presence of Christ, but to *experience* him in the table fellowship. Then, we are sent into the world to be an extension of the experience of Christ's living risen presence to others in touchable, tangible, real ways that make a difference. For we are not the only ones asking, "Where do we go from here?" And we are not the only ones who need to know God is with us, preparing a way and preparing us to enter the future.

St. Augustine, a fourth century bishop in North Africa, put it this way in an Easter sermon: "You are the body of Christ. In you and through you the work of the incarnation must go forward. You are to be taken; you are to be blessed, broken, and distributed; that you may be the means of grace and the vehicles of the eternal charity."

It is true today. As we know Christ we understand that we are to make Christ known when we walk out of here into the mission field at our doorstep. I'll remind you once more that those red doors open outward. We are fed so that we can feed others who are hungry, as we are, for that which satisfies the deepest hungers of our lives.

This year with you has been a blessing. Your new rector and his family are excited about joining you in the journey to which God is calling you. May the Spirit's tether draw you together in amazing ways. May you have faith in God, faith in your rector, and faith in one another – faith that will move mountains. May your generosity and hospitality be increasingly evident to all whom God sends to you. And may the peace which passes understanding guard your hearts and minds in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.