

September 21, 10 am to 10:30 am;  
PROCLAMATION: Changing contexts, response and new invitation

Where do we stand when we proclaim or cry out? We stand where Jesus stood. At the margins, from the border, and at the place of un-belonging! As a new immigrant I find this place of un-belonging quite fertile and meaningful for leadership. Every one of us can find ourselves such spiritual liminal spaces to reflect and lead from. A leadership model of Episcopate that seeks balance is relevant to us in an increasingly cross-culturally sensitive and multi-identity embracing 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Empowering the “other” both as a sacramental (Baptism) and as a missional (community of resurrection) imperative is important to frame Episcopate as leadership in Church and Society.

At the last summer Olympics the US track relay teams, both men and women, seemed to be plagued by a simple but serious problem, dropping the baton. Obviously, letting go at the right time is not easy and requires a great deal of practice. As I watched this in slow motion several times, I remember wondering if it was perhaps a metaphor for our cultural proclivity for individual celebrity that could contribute to us forgetting how to function as an interdependent body, caring for the good of the whole.

Our seasonal Lent is countercultural in that it reminds us that we can be intentional about letting go. But why do we let go? We let go so that we can empower others to run with the baton. Lent in many ways is a season when many of us exercise some degree of letting go of things we value so as to enable an inward journey into things of ultimate significance. Practicing some form of symbolic or actual "letting go" is a good way to prepare for our ultimate journey

into God's full embrace when we literally reach the last frontier to let go of all things temporal. Lent may well be a practice run for our eternal journey into God.

Another way to look at this practice of Lenten "letting go" is as a metaphor for an important aspect of leadership, which is about intentionally letting go by passing the baton to new leaders. Passing the baton is a sign of a healthy organization that seeks a higher purpose than merely individual celebrity. Jesus' temptations were perhaps about this when he had to remind himself that it was not all about him, and that he did not need to be the center of the universe to be God's beloved. He demonstrates this even further from the cross when he invites his beloved disciple to take over caring for his mother and *vice versa*.

Jesus' Easter appearances are pregnant with the message of empowerment to his female and male followers to live into this new way of being a resurrection people. He breathes the gift of Holy Spirit to empower the disciples before he "takes off," so to speak. If the risen Christ did not pass the baton and if the empowerment of the Holy Spirit did not occur, all we are left with is some kind of a codependent relationship with some version of a domesticated and parochial Jesus whom we can manipulate and make into our own image.

Our culture normalizes narcissism and often gives us a justified sense of entitlement. As Bishops in the Church, if we are not careful, this could lead to us holding on to responsibilities beyond their time. Of course, at the root of this holding on is the absence of a priority to responsibly empower others, which is the mandate to make disciples. Our baptismal commission is to create a culture of empowering others with the responsibility of bearing the Gospel: passing the baton.

Jesus' resurrection from the dead points to our core identity as Church: we are essentially Easter people amidst life's foibles and disasters. The power of resurrection gives us reason to stay away from despair, from fainting and from weariness as a way of life. In our creation narrative we are reminded that we are essentially "Very good!" At the beginning of Lent, we were reminded that we are dust! The pendulum of life seems to have the capacity to swing from dust to very good and from worthless to beloved. As moral agents, we have the capacity to consistently acknowledge who we are, and who we are going to be. We call this *recreation*. Becoming a Church that increasingly exudes Easter values (like generous hospitality, creative mission, and passionate spirituality) is crucial to our formation as re-created saints.

Recently, I was shocked to hear an Episcopalian say, "we (our congregation) will not grow..." and gave reasons for it. She is right, and unfortunately may not realize that she is fulfilling her own prophecy. She could eventually say, "I told you so." I say this not out of sappy notions of positive thinking. An interpretation of fatalism is about actuating what is already an ontological truth: that we are God's beloved made out of the dust to which we all return. We are endowed with the energy (our *original energy*) to determine where we want to end up. The Church has made its preferential option. Perhaps this is one of the reasons the final act in our worship is the Blessing, a proclamation of hope! We bless because we choose our destiny to be God's beloved saints, an Easter people rising from dust!

Our journey through this current season of a Lent like recession, to the cross and the empty tomb all remind us to refresh our memory, realign our priorities, and prepare to appropriate and proclaim the gift of resurrection. Our brokenness is a part of our existence, but it does not need to be our prescription unless we choose it. We are agents of transformation with

the capacity to restore or determine our destiny by the grace of God. As leaders in this beloved church, may we have the grace to dance with a healthy balance between our humility and transcendence, our ascribed identity and preferred identity, our ecclesiastical nobility and evangelistic vulnerability! The Lord of the dance did.