

From Bishop Johnson at General Convention in Columbus, Ohio

Day 11 in Columbus June 20, 2006

First let me say that celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of my ordination to the diaconate while here has been on my mind today. I think back over the pathways that God has opened and the roads traveled and those passed by. I think of our Church that has also taken pathways different than I expected, but I must admit that the views seen as I have come around these unplanned bends in the road have been at times breathtaking and life giving. This morning, after the usual meeting of Dispatch of Business, I participated in the Eucharist at which the bishop of Hawaii celebrated.

The Very Rev. George Werner preached. The translation from a new, yet to be published book of Alan Jones was cited by Dean Werner. Quoting from Psalm 85:10, Jones translated the familiar and comforting passage with new words that put an edge on what I had grown accustomed to hearing with a different ear. Instead of hearing that “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other,” the translation had it as “mercy and truth have collided; righteousness and peace have clashed.” Both are reasonable ways of interpreting this passage, and both take me to different places in my heart and mind as I process what it “means.”

The reading from Micah struck me with power as I reflected on the pathways of my life. In Micah 4:1-5 the images that jumped out at me were those that first spoke of the “mountain of the Lord’s house” that shall be “established as the highest of the mountains.” People shall come to this mountain of God and say: “Let us go up the mountain of the Lord... that God may teach us God’s ways and that we may walk in God’s paths.” I am struck by the plural reference to God’s ways and paths. I am also very aware today that both God’s ways and paths, though differing, lead up the mountain of God to the Lord’s own house. With this in mind, I recall again the idea that we are to walk toward that mountain, possibly by different paths, but always traveling toward God. I do not think for a minute that this path is the road to Jericho where one may well walk by those on the roadside and not stop to help them along the way. Rather, we are to travel the path among the paths of God and invite those we see to travel with us. But an invitation is different than a forced march. Instead, we are to be an invitational people. Let us go unto the mountain of God. My hope is that, as we are able, we will walk as the God opens the path ahead of us.

The House of Bishops spent much of our day doing legislative business with one ear to the door. We were waiting to hear from the House of Deputies on a number of resolutions that we could not address until they decided what the mind of their House was on each matter in its turn. We ended the night without an official response on the Windsor Report matters pending, but we heard progress reports on where things were by the time we recessed. We are going into an extraordinary Joint Session of both Houses tomorrow morning to seek a way together to decide on our Convention’s response to Windsor. Members of the Special Committee assigned this central topic of business for the Convention was meeting to prepare proposed language that might meet the many needs and concerns that have already been expressed by the various individuals and groups who

will be in some direct way affected by the decisions we make. Windsor is a process that is beginning, not a definite outcome that must be reached all at once. However, Windsor is specific as to its requests. How The Episcopal Church can respond with integrity as well as with a humble spirit will be the goal I hope we will be able to accomplish tomorrow.

Consents were given to all the bishops-elect that came before the Convention. The last consent was given by both Houses today. I am not in favor of continuing to do consents at General Convention. It sets up two very different processes by which persons will be considered “appropriate” for the ministry of bishop. We either need to do everyone’s consents at General Convention or no ones. I prefer the latter, and I was disappointed that the House of Deputies did not act to remove this provision of consents taking place within 120 days of Convention to take place in this way. At the end of the day, however, all who came forward for consents did in fact receive them.

I talked with the bishop of Missouri today about the possibility of West Tennessee establishing a companion diocese relationship with the Sudanese diocese of Mundri. There are some unique opportunities for a joint ministry by West Tennessee and Missouri, our neighbor across the river, and two neighboring dioceses in Sudan (that being with the dioceses of Lui and Mundri.) The two dioceses are composed of members of the same tribe, separated by a river, and their hope is that someone will show interest in and join with them in ministry and support. I am interested in having this conversation. The Bishop and Council is already establishing a committee to look at various aspects of domestic and global mission opportunities and needs. I will place this option on the agenda along with others already under way or being considered.

I had not set out to provide so many hymn texts for your consideration, but I have found that one or two hymns have really spoken to me each day at the Eucharist. Today the text comes from Bernadette Farrell, and we sang it as the Fraction Anthem. The refrain, “Bread of life, hope of the world, Jesus Christ, our brother: feed us now, give us life, lead us to one another” is followed with three short verses: “As we proclaim your death, as we recall your life, we remember your promise to return again. / [Refrain] / This bread we break and share was scattered once as grain: just as now it is gathered, make your people one. / [Refrain] / We eat this living bread, we drink this saving cup: sign of hope in our broken world, source of lasting love.” What comes to mind in this Fraction Anthem is the image of “fragments” being gathered in order to feed, give life, and lead us to one another, both as signs of the promise of Christ’s return and of hope of God’s promise of everlasting love. In this spirit of anticipating God’s action to bring about good news, I lie down to rest knowing that, while I am not God, I trust God to be God... and to be faithful to the promises that give us hope for the coming days.

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