

Diocesan Convention
November 11, 2011

Martin, Bishop of Tours, 316-397 A.D.
Isaiah 58:6-12; Matthew 25:34-40

The Rev. Canon Mary E. Hauck

The “do-over”: A state of anticipated bliss, when you catch a glimpse of the Glorious Impossible – A do-over has been granted. If I were a golfer, I would say “a mulligan.” If I were a more appropriate grown-up, I might say “a second chance.” But truth be told the do-over exceeds both these descriptors simply because the phrase itself grasps the childlike joy one takes in a righteous opportunity to declare a New Day and put one’s best foot forward.

Harvey Cox, the author of *The Future of Faith*¹ says we are right now, in our own time, poised for a New Day as we begin to reclaim the notion of Faith held by the earliest Christians. This understanding of Faith is compatible with current science and in sync with a postmodern worldview. It apprehends Faith in a manner antithetical to fundamentalism and intolerance in all forms, and is, I believe, consonant with the best aspects of the Episcopal Church in general, and the Diocese of Northern California in particular.

In other words, Christian Communities are being granted a do-over in our own time – and we, the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California, are beginning our next one hundred years at an extraordinary moment in the Church’s history – a moment pregnant with some exciting, if nerve-racking, possibilities.

No longer in thrall to cultural Christianity, we find that people are encountering Jesus in refreshing and surprising ways. In these encounters, folks are being brought face to face with the **Jesus of the Gospels**, and with his followers. They are encountering Christ as He is presented by those baptized in His Name, rather than through cultural inheritance or legacy.

They are encountering people like you and like me – and like the congregations you represent. This may not be filling our pews most Sundays because, for the most part, the encounters are taking place outside the walls of the Church – in our neighborhoods, our schools, our workplaces, the local food bank, on the boards of non-profits, while working with Veterans, coaching neighborhood kids, or leading home studies.

This is part of God’s great Do-Over. All over this diocese, I hear stories of how our Episcopal congregations are sharing their lived-faith. And people are noticing.

I was hungry and you fed me,
I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,
I was homeless and you gave me a room,
I was shivering and you gave me clothes,
I was sick and you stopped to visit,
I was in prison and you came to me.'

¹ Cox, Harvey, *The Future of Faith*, (Harper Collins, New York, 2009)

“When?” you ask... “Where?” you want to know.

When did we see Jesus hungry and feed Him, thirsty and give Him a drink? And when did we see Him sick or in prison and come to Him?

“I’m telling the solemn truth,” says the Lord, “Whenever you did even one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.” (*The Message, paraphrased*)

We are doing it – in large ways and small – Individually and collaboratively. And we will be doing more, because the world for whom Christ died, is in great need and Faith is becoming a verb as well as a noun in our own time.

And people are watching. People are noticing authentic Christian response. And they are seeking the kind of community God calls your Church to be and the path that we walk together as a Diocese.

Knowing the ‘Way of Christ’ as a spiritual practice is part of the great do-over. In what I am describing as the return to Faith over declining cultural church-going... and over denominational allegiance... people are observing other pilgrims. They desire true discipleship – they want to learn and they are seeking authentic teachers who are followers of Jesus. New Christians in the Great are evaluating churches for the hallmarks of real faith. In short, people are checking Christianity out, and they are hoping to find that we “walk the talk.”

It’s a bit nerve-wracking, though. The former ways of finding the Episcopal Church have shifted. No one’s looking in the phone book under “**E**” for **Established Episcopal Church** anymore. We had a good, long, historical run that way, didn’t we!

This time, God is calling people differently to our beloved Church. The encounters are varied and the connections are sometime serendipitous. I think, though, that it’s still filed under “E,” but this time its “**E**” for **Evidence, Effort, and Engagement:**

- Evidence of authentic Faith,
- Effort toward healing a broken world, and
- Engagement in a Spirituality that connects with the fullness of one’s humanity and with the world in which God lives and moves and has God’s being.

The question, of course, is what will we do with the do-over?

Will we hesitate? You know what happens to that one! “The one who hesitates is_____.”

Will we equivocate? “I’ll engage this moment of opportunity in the Church if I can keep everything I’ve already got... the way it is now.”

Or will we trust, walking by faith, though we lack 20-20 foresight? (*2 Corinthians 5:7*)

I know what the first Christians did – it’s spelled out in the Book of Acts. Chapter 14, Verse 27 (*The Message*) reads, “After being at work in the world and encouraging many, they arrived back at their local church. They called the congregation together “and reported on their trip, telling in detail how God had used them to throw the door of faith wide open so people of all nations could come streaming in.”

So I ask again, how shall we kick off our next 100 years of mission and ministry in the Diocese of Northern California? Here is my prayer.

God being our helper, we will continue in mission and ministry in the Episcopal tradition. This part is not new. It has always been the tradition of the Episcopal Church to offer:

- Evidence of authentic Faith,
- Effort toward healing a broken world, and
- Engagement in an incarnational Spirituality which connects the fullness of our humanity with the world in which God lives and moves and has God’s being, to God’s full and divine nature as expressed in the Trinity.

Other things are newer... and more challenging.

God being our helper, we will embrace effectiveness as a Gospel Value. This will take discernment and the courage to be successful. A friend and mentor of mine, Reggie McNeal, writes that “when Jesus talked about serving others, he assumed that the service would actually be helpful to its recipients and that those offering the service would be accomplished in administering what is necessary.” We will embrace effectiveness in ministry as a Gospel Value. “Jesus was not incompetent, nor did he look for that quality in others,” says McNeal.²

God being our helper, we will raise up more Servant Leaders. This implies more than volunteerism. To really serve God’s people we must embrace the Gospel Value of acting on the responsibility of being Servant Leaders within and between our congregations. This isn’t filling slots. This is building people up. Again, I quote McNeal, “Great leaders bless people. They inspire and encourage. They help others become part of something bigger than themselves.”³

Jesus did this. He recognized and called out the best in people and set them to work for the sake of the Gospel. This is something we can and are doing. Both inside and outside the walls of our buildings, this is how people in our communities are encountering Jesus and the Episcopal Church – through you and through me. Servant leaders, lay and ordained, provide inspiration and call people to join them in making a difference.

God being our helper, we can start out our next 100 years living even more fully into the vision of the people of God, presented in Isaiah 58:6-12:

² McNeal, Reggie, *The Practice of Greatness* (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco 2006), p3

³ *Ibid*, p4

“If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness.... The Lord will guide you continually... and make your bones strong... Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.”

Will we hesitate? Will we equivocate? Or will we step forward in faith and claim a New Day?

I pray, *God being our helper*, we step forward in faith.

Amen.