

# **“We have a Gospel to Proclaim”**

## **Sermon at Diocese of Dallas Special Convention**

**March 6, 2010: Dallas, Texas USA**

**(Romans 11:33-36; Ps 29; Matt.28:18-20)**

Thank you very much to y'all and especially to Bishop Stanton for inviting me to preach at your Special Diocesan Convention. It is such an honour! I bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters from Malawi and indeed from the Anglican Communion.

What a task it is to preach on such a well known passage and talk about the Anglican Communion at the same time. I hope to go one better and talk about Jesus while doing it!

Talking about the Anglican Communion... Isn't it a wonder that we still have a Gospel to preach?! Many a time I have wondered what this is about and where it is we are headed.

“Fighting within and fighting without!” Thinking about that hymn; it has the refrain “O Lamb of God I come: I come”. “We have a Gospel to proclaim...” we have also sung at times but, somehow, we aren't so sure any more. In fact one is confronted with “Which Gospel?” as if there is more than one!

We are in that place where one is not sure whether one is preaching the wrong Gospel or one is the only one left preaching the true Gospel. It is like “do you not see”? Is it worth it anymore? Does anyone care? But of course everyone cares and they are watching the Anglicans/Episcopalians bleed themselves to death and wondering when the Gospel is going to have a chance to be proclaimed.

As an Anglican I feel trapped. As I have said somewhere, (quoting one of my favourite musicians) “There must be some kind of way out of here. There is too much confusion... there

are some here among us who think this is but a joke...Do they know what any of this is worth?"  
I would add "do they know what is at stake"?

I have found that many think it is "this view or that view? Sex or no sex? Or even what kind of sex? Orthodoxy or Innovation?" Blessing or not blessing, ordaining or not ordaining? And all the power games involved. I am persuaded that it is none of these: important though they are to the "confusion". When I hear all these I tend to think that we have made it all about us! It is not about us or even about them. It is about God. And there is a Gospel to proclaim.

I cannot help but think of the prophet Elijah and how, even when he had made his point and "demonstrated the power of God" he could run away and hide and think he is the only one left. The beleaguered prophet who found himself believing that he was the only one left "with a Gospel to proclaim" and the only place left for him to go was the mountains where he hoped to survive only for a while and in the end die or be killed by Jezebel!

There are times when I think God has no sense of humour. God says to Elijah "No sulking here, Don't be childish. Get out of here and get on with it. There are more of you out there than you can count! It's not about you and not about your life but about God, who God is and God's place in the universe. No Jezebel or any powers or principalities can get in the way of the Gospel; only you and your fear. So go on get out of here and get proclaiming"!

How I wish I was the one who wrote that bit of scripture!!!

Anyway, what has this to do with today's Gospel?

We have a beleaguered bunch of disciples. Confused, dispirited, wondering what will become of them now that their teacher (and possibly Saviour!) is gone. As you can tell I am also stretching the Matthew story here but such is the context of the Gospels' resurrection story. I also hear another assumption in this part of Matthew. It is not specifically spelt out but this sounds very much like a farewell speech than a "hello I am back!" one. I am convinced that this "double tongued" (hello and goodbye) conversation brings together the feelings I have and I suppose you do to: feelings of joy and trepidation at the same time in the onerous task of proclaiming the Gospel entrusted to us.

This is the privilege of telling the story after the event with the advantage of hindsight which Matthew is exploiting here. This is the story of Immanuel – God with us- the ever present Christ who is also the Christ who is “seated at the right hand of the father in heaven”. Jesus begins by claiming all authority – which should be a reassuring thing especially having just defied death and the grave! He then goes on to give a charge to the disciples “to go... make disciples of all nations, . . . baptizing and teaching!”

Now this is the guy who has done that and gotten himself into trouble. Granted he has given them a foretaste of what <sup>it</sup> is like to be sent out to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God when he sent some of them to do similar things earlier in his ministry. Not only does crucifixion happen when you do this, the field for you to cover is even widened to include all nations. And then this veiled “good bye, it’s all yours! *Adios amigos!*”! May be it is just a reassurance that he is not going anywhere – not soon at least. But as we know from the other Gospels he was going to leave them. However, he does assure them that he is going to be with them to the end of the age. I suppose it was a clever way of reminding them that he is Immanuel. Is that consolation enough? I believe that Jesus believed it was and from later stories of the disciples and apostles it seems that they got the message.

St. Paul, a later convert to this band, talks about preaching in season and out of season and being in and out <sup>of</sup> trouble for doing so and recounts the many countless calamities that befell him as he did so. The proclamation of the Gospel is an uncomfortable place to be! That Gospel is not about us. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul would say, “We preach not ourselves but Jesus Christ crucified”.

The domestication of the Gospel we see all around us and about which we have many a *mea culpa* to recite is the problem. We have made it our Gospel, our truth, our little click’s version of it.

Is the truth we have been charged with not bigger than that? Is the Jesus who has given us the task not the same Immanuel! What are you doing here in your little mountain feeling alone? Sometimes I get the feeling that we are too obsessed with protecting and preserving our version of Anglicanism that we lose sight of the task of proclaiming the Good News. Identities

are important and I also think Anglicanism is important and uniquely placed in God's plan for the evangelization of the world but I also believe that the Gospel is bigger than Anglicanism or any other denomination whatsoever. We are to proclaim the gospel. Yes in our Anglican way, but not as beleaguered clicks of its expression but as confident witnesses of the saving and enduring power of Jesus, the Immanuel.

My brothers and sisters in the Anglican Communion, we have a Gospel to proclaim!<sup>1</sup> All authority is with Jesus Christ and he has charged us with a task. It may be that we believe that in our fractiousness we are doing it but I am convinced there is a better way. Fractiousness is about us and not about God. The Gospel is about God in Christ reconciling the world to himself and through the Holy Spirit empowering us to do the same. Fractiousness and entrenchment in our (as you say in Texas) "hidie hos" of orthodoxy or lack thereof isn't. I am persuaded that we are in danger of derailing the mission of God in Christ by our behaviour and contentiousness and thus doing the opposite of the charge given here in Matthew. The Gospel is at stake. Jesus Christ is at stake. It is not about us!

We are behaving as if "all authority has been given to us and our click" and Jesus no longer features. The mountains are beckoning for those who would rather run. Self serving holding on to what is understood to be Anglican seems to be what gives comfort to others and for yet others it is political suaveness. Where is Jesus in all this? If only we can focus on Him who was, and is and is to come we may "have a Gospel to proclaim". This may sound very naïve and too simplistic a solution to our complex struggle. <sup>But as Jesus prayed,</sup> "Thank you O, God for you have revealed these truths not to the wise to the children and innocent!"

Back to the Elijah imagery – it was not in the thunder and fireworks that God spoke. Bob Dylan lends his wisdom:

"No reason to get excited" the thief he kindly spoke.

There are many here among us who feel life is but a joke

But you and I have been through that and this is not our fate.

So let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late.

Time for our games is running out. In fact I believe it has run out already! It is time to focus on Jesus and turn to him in repentance saying, "Fighting within and fighting without but O Lamb of God, I come: I come". Once we have our eyes on Jesus we can preach nothing less. "We have a Gospel to proclaim" and the Lord is with us even "to the end of the age". "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching to obey everything that I have commanded you", says he. It is not about you but about Jesus Christ and him crucified!

**And now to him who was, who is and is to come be glory on earth and in heaven. Even so come Lord Jesus! Amen**