

A SEASON OF PENTECOST HOMILY BY RICHARD B. TUDOR

June 27, 2021 * Pentecost 5

A STROLL DOWN MEMORY LANE

My sister's birthday was about four weeks ago, May 25th. She would have been 71 years old. Unfortunately, she died on December 20th of last year. She was born in 1949, a member of the post-WWII baby boom. I am seven years older. I begin on this sad note, because one of the things I associate with her birth is my first memory of actually being in church. Her baptism! She was the first child baptized in our new church building, also part of the post-WWII boom. Here is a picture of it. St. George's Episcopal Church in Bismarck, North Dakota, right across the street from the old Governor's mansion. St. George's was modeled along the lines of an English country church.

Our longtime rector, the Rev. A.E. (Ted) Smith was a Canadian and interested in church architecture. The borders of the church's stained-glass windows (of which there are 45) were comprised of pieces of stained glass from bombed out English churches (WWII). We Thought that our parish church was beautiful, and it was. It still is! And I know every inch of it.

I worshipped in that building for over ten years until I left for the university in the fall of 1960. One of my other "first memories" of church was being introduced to the congregation there as an acolyte along with my brother in the early 1950's. My brother and his wife are still there. My sister and my brother and I were all confirmed there. I was ordained there. My father served as Senior Warden; my brother has been senior warden several times. My parents are interred there in the church columbarium which my family donated to the church. An uncle of mine is interred there. I will officiate at the interment of my sister there in late August, God willing. I say all this to emphatically make the point that our parish church was in my youth and is still today an important part of my family's lives. Getting out of bed on Sunday mornings, putting on a suit and going to worship there was a fixed ritual! The church loved us and we loved it! We celebrated good times there and we brought our sorrows there. As we will do at the end of August

The point I am really attempting to make through my recitation of personal family history is that active membership in a parish church is an important and essential part of life. What other institution makes the effort to interpret your personal life to you as an aspect of the love of God? Throughout my ordained ministry I have been constantly fascinated by the critical role which the parish church plays both in the lives of people and the communities in which they live. The pariah church is the basic unit of the Church's life. It is here that the great battles of Christianity for the souls of people are fought and won or lost. I hope that you all remember that! Here, right here is where the battle is fought between good and evil. We are in the trenches.

And who leads the parishes? The ordained clergy! On their shoulders fall much of the responsibility. I don't think that many of us really understand the magnitude and weight of this frightening responsibility when we consider ordination. It's almost frightening to look back now at how green I was when I got out of seminary! I don't know about Tamsen's experience, but my seminary taught us very little about the practical aspects of leading a parish church. As a matter of fact, I will say that it is the people in the congregations of parish churches like Trinity who really train the clergy for ministry.

As I look back on my early years of ordained ministry, I regard myself as extremely fortunate. The system in the Episcopal Church used to be that when young men graduated from seminary, they went to large, established churches as curates to get their feet on the ground. In 1971, I was lucky and got hired as one of two curates at St Paul's Episcopal Church in Akron, Ohio. St. Paul's had 2500 parishioners. It was also known as the Firestone church. The church property had formerly been the polo field on the Firestone family estate in West Akron. The staff consisted of four full time clergy, a full-time organist and choir master, and an office staff of five. Growing up in North Dakota, I was not even aware that Episcopal churches of that size even existed. One of my responsibilities at St. Paul's was to be the chaplain for the men and boys' choir.

In 1974, Liz and I married on June 22nd and five weeks later we left for North Dakota where I had decided to return to become the rector of St. Peter's in Williston and the Vicar of St. Michael & All Angel's in Cartwright, a mission church which was forty miles from Williston and about three miles from the Montana border. Williston was also 340 miles from the cathedral in Fargo. I suddenly found myself in a completely different ministry situation. I had left a church with almost limitless resources of money and people to begin serving two small churches which had to scrape to pay my salary, the utility bills and the diocesan assessment. Liz thought I was crazy!

I found that I was now a one- man band. I literally did everything at the church or had to "con" someone else into doing it. I think Liz typed the Sunday bulletins when we first got there. I ran them off on a mimeograph machine. I will never forget that smell! I spent little or no time in the parish office. What would I do sitting around there? St. Peter's had no computer or copying machine or parish secretary. I was out all the time seeing and visiting with people.

Remember what I said earlier about the people training the clergy. That happens in the kind of small church situation in which I found myself in Williston and Cartwright. I also note that it was in Williston, in 1982, that I was recruited into the North Dakota Army National Guard. All good things must come to an end! In 1989 - after fifteen years in Williston and four children - I was called to the Diocese of Missouri to become the Rector of St. Barnabas in Florissant.

We had all kinds of adventures in Florissant. Upon my arrival I found myself completely embroiled in a building project which had severely divided the congregation. But the building addition got built, thank God, and was dedicated in 1992. I got called up to active duty in the United States Army in 1997 and was gone about a year. I returned in 1998 and retired ten years later in 2008. Liz and I knocked around for a few years and landed at Trinity in about 2014.

The focus of today is supposed to be anniversaries! The 49th anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood was this past May 3. The 50th anniversary of my ordination to the diaconate was three days ago, June 24th, the Nativity of St. John the Baptist. To refresh my memory of those milestones, I recently read through both of those services in the prayer book.

In the examination of the candidate for ordination to the diaconate, the statement is made that: *At all times, your life and teaching are to show Christ's people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ himself.* One of the suggested Gospel reading at that service is the reading from Luke 22 which was read this morning. It contains this statement from the mouth of Jesus: "I am among you as one who serves." In the book of the Acts of the Apostles, it is those individuals set aside as deacons who distribute food to the widows and orphans of the early Christian community.

In the liturgy for ordination to the priesthood, a very significant moment is found at the conclusion of the prayer of consecration of the ordinand. The Bishop gives a Bible to the newly ordained person and says: *Receive this Bible as a sign of the authority given you to preach the Word of God and to administer his holy sacraments. Do not forget the trust committed to you as a priest of the Church of God.* That statement should haunt us all our lives, those of us who are called and ordained to be priests.

During ordination to the priesthood, the ordinand in reply to a question about the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church replies by making the following statement: . . . *I solemnly declare that I do believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God and to contain all things necessary to salvation, and I do engage to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church.* In case you are wondering, the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church are contained in the Book of Common Prayer and the Bible. Our worship is a statement of what we believe!

Conclusion

It is time to bring these semi-organized ramblings to an end. First of all. I want to personally thank Tamsen and the congregation here at Trinity for this day. It means a lot to Liz and I. Finally, I want to remember and thank all of the people in the four congregations in and at which I served, in the past, as a clergyman. When I first started to travel this road in the church, I would have never believed that Liz and I would meet so many wonderful, committed people and make the lifelong friendships which we have been extremely fortunate to have made. So thanks to our friends at St. Paul's, St. Peter's, St. Michael & All Angel's and at St. Barnabas. As Bob Hope used to say, "Thanks for the memories!" Sadly, many of those people are now deceased! That fact makes it tough. Thanks also to the people of Trinity for taking us in, so to speak! And My final thank you is to Liz for having stuck with me over these past fifty years. The church is a demanding vocation and often the Rector's family finds itself in second place. I apologize for that!

Amen