

July 1, 2019

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In less than two weeks now the Anglican Church of Canada will gather for General Synod in Vancouver under the theme “I have called you by name.” There are a lot of things on the agenda, of course, and the details for all of this in on the diocesan website together with suggested prayers. The purpose of this letter is to encourage you all in your personal prayers for the synod, and to share a few words.

Our general synods are a time when the church comes together through representatives, lay and ordained, from every diocese. Everyone with equal voice and vote in the business of being church – this could sound so very dry, but of course the business of being church is all about how we are called to live together and how our lives reflect the faith we proclaim. This is not dry at all.

Over her history the church has had good synods and bad synods, peaceful and contentious ones, to the point that sometimes we fear getting together because both our agreements and disagreements will be voiced. It is important to remember that honesty in our dealings with one another and making room for the ‘other’ voice is part of who we are.

In my personal preparations for this General Synod I have returned to the retreat addresses of Rowan Williams from the Lambeth Conference of 2008. Although they were intended for the Bishops gathered at the conference I think the addresses have a lot to say to the ministry of all followers of Jesus and especially those who have been elected as leaders from our various dioceses to gather at General Synod. I reproduce a little of ++Rowan’s last address here, in the hope that it may help you as it continues to help me:

*“First let us look at Hebrews 10.19—25: ‘Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place, by the blood of Jesus. By a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience, and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold, unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together (as some are in the habit of doing) but let us encourage one another all the more as you see the day approaching.’*

*Jesus has opened a new way for us. That is the theme that occurs again and again in the letter to the Hebrews. He has gone ahead of us, he has gone into a place where we ourselves cannot go. It is the place of atonement, the altar at the centre of the Temple and it is at the same time the Cross where he makes reconciliation between God and the world. Jesus is our leader, quite simply because he goes before us to clear the way. He makes a new and living way through the curtain, the veil, through his body itself. We enter into his body, the fellowship of Christians and in him we pass into the holy place. So leadership, if you want to use that word here, is not about giving commands, not even about making decisions, it is*

*quite literally about leading, clearing the way, making it possible for us to go where otherwise we could not. It is clearing the way to the cross the way to God the Father. And once we've understood the centrality of this image—Jesus leading by clearing the way—then we understand (and its really devastatingly simple) that the only way Christians lead is by following - following Jesus' way.*

*And our leadership in the mission of God in his Church depends on discerning that way. We need to have the skill, the insight and the freedom to see where the new and living way opens up, where Jesus goes before us. And it's an important reminder of something which I'm sure you don't need reminding of: that our mission is not 'taking Jesus where he is not already' but 'going where he has cleared the way'. Actually, when you think about it, what an extraordinary idea it is, that we should take Jesus where he's not been before! Poor, nervous, frightened Jesus who needs us to hold his hand in dangerous places. Surely not! – Jesus goes before us and we are the trembling children seeking the courage to walk where he leads. But as I've said, this needs discernment.*

*There are, as you all know, groups that work by reinforcing each other's anxieties. Bishops, I'm afraid, live in such groups quite a lot of the time. But in Hebrews, the picture put before us is one of a group of Christians whose life together is about reminding one another of what God has made possible. The binding reality is not anxiety, it's hope. There is a way; and as we seek to minister together, to exercise our episcopal ministry in communion, that must be part of what we continue to say to one another. God opens a new and living way in Jesus.*

*So, in conclusion, let's simply pray for Christ to lead us in the days ahead. We don't know precisely where we shall come to in our discussions, in our exchange of perspective and experience and fear and hope. But at this stage of our meeting, what I believe is essential and life-giving, is to know that God has opened a new and living way; that Jesus truly is ahead of us, calling us to follow with him. Let's pray for grateful clarity about what he has done, and what he is doing and what he will do. The way he has opened is the way to the cross. The way to the cross is the only way to the resurrection and the Father's heart. All that we know, all that we tell ourselves daily – let us now simply allow that to sink in as both challenge and hope.” © Rowan Williams, 2008*

Please be of good heart for the upcoming synod, know that we gather in communion as men and women of good faith to take counsel together for the church we *all* love. We gather as brothers and sisters created in the image of Christ and sharing a responsibility to reflect that image to the world. We gather as those who have experienced the love of Christ in our own lives and as people who long to witness to that love to others. We gather as a people of hope. It is my belief that if every single delegate remembers whose we are then we will treat one another as we would treat Christ; we will speak as though Christ were indeed present in the room (which, of course, He will be).

Our General Synod meets every three years, so in Vancouver, 2019 we will ask ourselves: where is Jesus leading the way for the Anglican Church of Canada? What will the church look like in 2022? What is God's new and living way right in our midst? I think that asking these very large over-arching questions allows us to take all the conversations and resolutions together from

General Synod, and enables us to see how everything is connected. We explore how our conversations about the shape of the church, leadership, governance, sacraments, social and environmental justice, liturgy etc. all coalesce to show the inclusive love of God, and shows the world a church deep in prayer, discerning the will of God together and determined to leave no one behind.

In Christ  
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