



The Shepherd's Staff

***Newsletter of the
Diocese of the Western States***

November 2020

The Right Reverend Donald M. Ashman

bishopashman@gmail.com

Saint Luke's Day

There is no doubt that Saint Luke was a real person who was a physician, historian, and painter. He was Greek and born at Antioch. We do not know if he was a Gentile or Hellenized Jew but we do know that Luke wrote the Third Gospel and the Book of Acts (both for a Gentile audience) and may have contributed to the Letter to the Hebrews. We also know that he was a friend and disciple of Saint Paul (*Colossians 4. 14 - Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings; and Timothy 4:11 - Only Luke is with me*). According to the Early Church Father, Saint Epiphanius, Saint Luke was one of the seventy disciples Jesus sent out for the harvesting of souls. Moreover, Christian tradition (around the eighth century) states that Saint Luke was the first icon painter and is said to have painted holy pictures of the Virgin Mary and Child. And according to more reliable tradition, Saint Luke died at age 84 in Boeotia in Greece.

In religious art, Saint Luke is often depicted with an ox or a winged ox. It is important to remember that the ox was one of the major sacrificial animals of the Jewish cultus, but more importantly, the ox was a symbol of patience and strength. Thus, almost invariably the ox and the ass appear in paintings of the Nativity – and as figurines in our modern nativity crèche-scenes. For the early Church Fathers, the ox was also a symbol for Christ, who was the one true sacrifice for all the sins of men and women. And just as Jesus bore his temptations and trials with supreme and implacable patience, so in like manner the ox represents Jesus' disciples – then and now – who patiently bear their burdens while laboring in the Lord's vineyard – for the good of their brothers and sisters. And so, the ox is the special symbol of Saint Luke who did not die a martyr's death but had to face the trials of a long life.

Indeed, we live in an age that calls for persistence and patience. Let us be honest. A lot of people – Christian and non-Christian – think that the Church is finished or hope that it will disappear into the values of this world. We need to have the courage to press-on the kingdom and by that, I mean to continue to do the work of apostles. The Church that was born at Pentecost changed the world, but it wasn't easy. The Church was not just nourished by martyrs' blood but by the patience and persistence its members. Every century has seen persecution, agnosticism, heresy, and cowardice. But Christ's faithful have always triumphed. And that calls for the strength of an ox; it is what we mean when we promise the bishop at our Confirmations that we will follow Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour.

Please consider that oxen are of little value until they are yoked. Only then can they be put to work for their masters. We were yoked at our baptisms and are put to work with our confirmations. It is interesting in the Gospel that we are told that the Lord appointed seventy disciples (the Lord's oxen) and sent the by twos to go where the Lord would go; and that the harvest was great. He sent them forth as lambs among wolves and commissioned them to convert the world. Saint Luke was said to be one of those seventy. Well so are we. We are sent into the darkened world as the Lord's oxen, patient, brave and persistent.

From Saint Stephen's Anglican Church in Napa

"Let us give Him thanks and praise."

We are entering into a spiritual season focused on gratitude ... of thanksgiving. We strive to hold onto the certainty that the elemental reality of our very existence is breathed into being by the Holy Spirit of Almighty God. And as Christians knowing God is with us now personally in our lives, we expect to experience that great love affair surrounding us always.

That's high sounding and it's true. But in the midst of a year of pandemic and fire, that can seem very far removed from us. I remember the janitor at a very "high Altar" church staring up at the life sized Corpus on the Crucifix and saying, "If you really care about us, why don't you come down from there and do something about this mess we're in?" He wasn't comforted by the power of the symbol of Christ's atoning sacrifice. He wanted something tangible in his life to grasp onto in the midst of disease, loss and crushing uncertainty. So many things happen to us that wound our hearts and dash our hopes in the course of our lives. Things that seem stupid and cruel.

Several weeks ago, during the evacuations from the dangerous fire storms again ravaging our bucolic Napa paradise, our lovely little chapel was looted ... despite all the efforts of law enforcement patrolling the Oakville grade area. They smashed windows to get in. They made quite a mess in their smash and grab strike. They tore off the very Tabernacle from the Altar and took with it the silver chalice within filled with consecrated Hosts. They took anything made of brass ... bells and offering plates. An ugly and shocking violation of God's house in a little church apparently unmolested in over 120 years.

So where's the surrounding love and our gratitude and thanksgiving, you might ask. As Christians throughout the centuries we know to take the blows and look for opportunities to be examples of Jesus to others. If we are living in an attitude of thanksgiving, we look not at the losses but for the gains in shared love and humanity. They broke in and stole ... but they did not evilly vandalize or destroy. Oddly, they did not take the big brass candle sticks. Everyone in our congregation pulled together with love and even humor. Other churches, near and far, reached out to us to help us restore the lost items. But most important, we prayed for those who violated us. We prayed for their forgiveness and welfare ... for them to "have better minds." We prayed for them because we are now in an unasked for, but very real relationship with them as we know that our sins will be forgiven us "as we forgive those who trespass against us." This isn't just immediate and personal ... it's a web of consequences covering the whole world and going back through all history. We all have our part. No one is without sin ... and no one is beyond our forgiveness through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit of God Almighty. Whether it's the planet's climate or the climate of love and concern we have or don't for each other, we live in a created cosmos where everything and everyone is inextricably linked.

That God on the Cross IS listening and indeed suffering with us as we do the best we can with this mess. Just remember, we are sojourners ... just passing through on our way to where "smash and grab" doesn't happen. To "where our sufficiency is of God."

The Rev. Canon Charles Dillon



Two Homilies from Our Suffragan Bishop

Truth

IF we were to invent a religion people couldn't resist, offering everyone's fondest dreams, humanity's opiate, could we do worse than Christianity? If it's borne of cunning fables, explain Jesus.

The world and other religions say Christians are wrong: the Son of God didn't come to earth and die for all sin. He didn't say, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." John 14:6 He didn't rise to life. People aren't saved by Him nor will we live forever. Somebody made all this up. Jesus never lived or he's wildly exaggerated. Outside Christianity, the word is that our faith is made up. As the world's largest religion, it's quite successful fooling people: pretty lies, cunningly devised. If we're idiots, 2.2 billion idiots prove our lies are powerful. Christian beliefs are slick indeed, using tricks to addict and beguile people.

So, then explain the Beatitudes. Explain the Jesus of the New Testament. Explain him murdered, dying as a criminal, despite our wild claims of His divinity. If we created a lying religion, would we conjure a Savior like this? Jesus doesn't play to the crowds. Christ gives no false comfort or saccharine claims to beguile gullible masses. We are either very foolish or else we hear the voice of God, and we know this is true. Jesus is God or a mass manipulator. I look at the evidence, and conclude this faith is crafted by One who made this very world that we ruined. Every element fits into the whole. It's not only true, it's Truth, and "we did not follow cunningly devised fables." 2 Peter 1:16

Christians sometimes fashion worship to suit clientele and weaken hard teachings with soft words. But Christ has exposed all the frauds ever invented, and is shining His goodness to all the world in is painfully plain message. "I forgive you." Humbly receive His truth and rejoice. +PFH

Sealed

There's a brand on your back pocket, your car's logo, Walt Disney's brush-like signature, Nike's swoosh, California's bear, a ring that says you're married.

Ancient king's letters required a sign of their authenticity, melted wax with an imprinted symbol from his ring. The scroll of God's final plan was seven times sealed. Only the Lamb could break the seals. Angels embossed God's seal on the saints' foreheads. In earth's last days that seal identifies you, if you've suffer all the pains of a dying earth righteously, and are found with the redeemed, or merely marked by the beast. What seal do you wear—the Lamb or the beast? Do you care about this as much as the labels on your clothing? that you're sealed for eternal life? Our seal is the Holy Spirit. How do we know the Spirit has sealed us?

Read again the Beatitudes in Matthew Chapter 5. These are the signs we seek: poverty of spirit, mournfulness, meekness, hunger and thirst. God looks at the heart. We indeed are poor, we should be sorrowful, we need to humble our hearts and recognize our souls' great need. Then we may fully receive the Holy Spirit and not just show off our labels.

It's All Saints, a day when not just Peter, Paul, John and Philip are recognized. Heaven will hold a multitude beyond count, just average Joes with kids and payments and lawns and blue jeans. But glory shall be revealed in them. God sees it now. We will see it later.

The Holy Spirit is the seal. Not an action. Not a certificate. Not one event when you gave your heart. The seal is a Person, the Holy Spirit. This tag is inside, invisible to most. Don't forbid His searching you out. Invite Him. This is your day. We are sealed with the Spirit of God unto eternity. +PFH

From Saint Chad's, Colorado Springs

"Go Weapons Hot" is a military command that means to make whatever preparations are necessary so that when you pull the trigger, something happens. In spiritual terms, are we using live ammunition or are we firing blanks? In other words, are we making the preparations necessary to ensure that our efforts to combat evil and rescue souls are ignited by the fire of the Holy Spirit? What are the preparations necessary so that "something (effective) happens" as we exercise the three offices of Christ in the war "against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness, the evil spirits in regions above" (Eph 6:10-12)? The word "hot" ("Go Weapons Hot") gives us an excellent acronym for understanding how we are best positioned to receive the free offer of God's supernatural grace: H.O.T. = Humility, Obedience, Trust.

Humility: "Behold! In the Cross all doth consist, and in our dying thereon all lieth; for there is no other way unto life, and unto true inward peace, but the way of the holy Cross, and of daily mortification. Walk where thou wilt, seek whatsoever thou wilt, thou shalt not find a higher way above, nor a safer way below, than the way of the holy Cross." Of the King's High Way of the Holy Cross; Chapter XII, Book II, The Imitation of Christ.

Obedience: "Jesus hath now many lovers of His heavenly kingdom, but few bearers of His Cross. Many He hath that are desirous of consolation, but few of tribulation. Many He findeth that share His table, but few His fasting. All desire to rejoice with Him, few are willing to endure any thing for Him. Many follow Jesus unto the breaking of bread; but few to the drinking of the Cup of His Passion." (St. Luke 9:14; St. Luke 22:41, 42). How Few Are the Lovers of the Cross of Jesus; Chapter XI, Book II, The Imitation of Christ.

Trust: "Be pure and free within, and not entangled with any creature. Thou oughtest to be unclothed and ever to carry thy heart pure toward God, if thou wouldest be free from the world and see how sweet the Lord is (Psalm 34:9). And truly, unless thou be prevented and drawn by His grace, thou shalt never attain to that happiness, to empty thyself of all, and take leave of all, that thou alone mayest with Him alone be made one. For when the grace of God cometh unto a man, that he is made able for all things. And when it goeth away, then shall he be poor and weak, and, as it were, left only to stripes. In this case he ought not to be cast down, nor to despair; but at God's will to stand with even mind, and whatever come upon him to endure it for the glory of Jesus Christ; for after winter followeth summer, after night the day returneth, and after a tempest a great calm." (St. Matthew 8:26). Of Familiar Converse with Jesus, Chapter VIII, Book II, The Imitation of Christ. Are you ready? Go H.O.T. Deacon Michael Ruffino, St. Chads, CO

2021 Ordo Kalendars

The 2021 Ordo Kalendars have been prepared, printed and are available for immediate purchase. The Ordo Kalendar conforms to the 1928 Prayer Book and both the American and Anglican Missals. The Ordo Kalendar is in full color and edited for Church use by Father Matthew Weber of Saint Ann's Chapel in Palo Alto. There is space on the front of the Kalendar where a parish may, if desired, insert a picture, its name and other pertinent information after receiving the Kalendars. Direct inquiries to Mrs. Nona Gourley (209) 862-2582 or email: order1928bcpcalendar@gmail.com. Ordo Kalendars are not only a necessity for every sacristy but good advertising for visitors. Have them available in the narthex.

News from Saint Joseph's Seminary

Bishop Hansen's class in Church History, Canon Jones' class in Spiritual Discernment and Bishop Ashman's Third Semester Greek class are moving along nicely and will conclude by mid-December. Next semester will offer Fourth Semester Greek. From January 5th to March 16th there will be a mixed class for postulants, clergy, and laity, *Historical Theology Made Simple* and from April 13 to June 15 there will be a Deacon's Practicum class. More details in the December *Shepherd's Staff*. Stay tuned.

News from the Anglican Churchwomen

November already, and yet this has been a strange long and hard year. Many of us have been cut off from our churches, unable to worship as we wish, yet kept together by the marvels of Zoom, Facebook, and YouTube. We have been able to follow the centuries old words of the Prayer Book, which have given comfort to many generations through war, pestilence, and strife. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to our priests who have kept us as one congregation, even if we could not physically be together. A heartfelt thank you to you all.

November brings us thoughts of Advent, and the new church year. Hopefully, we will be able to celebrate our traditional church Christmas, with carols and the triumph of Christ's birth. Even if we are not allowed to do this, we will be together in spirit and hope for the year ahead. We will pray that we can come together at Synod in Chico and look back on this as a time of learning and refreshment of our beliefs.

One more reminder for Lenten Offerings. I know that many churches haven't been able to collect the Mite Boxes, but if you have any outstanding donations, please send them to me, Gillian Golden, Provincial ACW Lenten Chairman, P.O. Box 558, Selma, OR 97538-0558. The money goes for student support at St Joseph of Arimathea Seminary, and is always urgently needed. Thank you to all those parishes which have already contributed.

Looking forward to a much brighter year ahead.

Gillian Golden, President ACW-DWS

Thank You...

1. ...to the clergy and laity of the Diocese of the Western States who, during these last eight months have held our Churches intact. Your dedication and generosity have kept the home fires burning. You are simply remarkable.
2. ...to our steadfast priests and deacons who have found new and creative ways in this pandemic infested year to bring the Church to their flocks. God bless you, reverend gentlemen, and your unceasing labors in the vineyard!
3. ...to our faithful ladies, our clergy wives, our altar guilds and to all the members of the Anglican Church Women whose support is invaluable; and especially Gillian Golden who never needs to be prodded for *Shepherd's Staff* ACW news articles.
4. ...to the faculty of Saint Joseph of Arimathea Seminary and not only for their outstanding instruction but also for their scholarship. Thanks especially to Father Michael Mautner, Father Matthew Weber, Father David Napier, Canon Ben Jones, Bishop Peter Hansen, Bishop Blair Schultz, Fr. Dr. Paul Russell, Dr. Paul Evans, and Archbishop John Upham. The seminary is our future.
5. ...for those parishes and individuals who have been more than generous this last month. No names but you know who you are. And I am humbled by your love.
6. ...to the Archbishop and the Council of Bishops who have been laying the groundwork for future growth and stability in the Anglican Province of Christ the King.



God is always coming to you in the Sacrament of the Present Moment. Meet and receive Him there with gratitude in that sacrament.

Evelyn Underhill

A Sermon for All Souls' Day

Leo Tolstoy once told the story of a man who lived to seventy years of age and lived in sin all that time. However, he had been raised in the Church and, on the verge of death; he wept and cried for all around him to hear, "Lord, forgive me as you forgave the good thief upon the cross." At that moment, his soul left his body and instantly he awakened and found himself at the gates of heaven.

He knocked on the gates and a voice within asked him, "Who is it that knocks at the gates of Paradise and what deeds did he do during his life? Then he heard the voice of the Accuser – the old Devil Satan who wanted the man's soul for himself to torment for eternity - told of all the man's deeds – no, not one of them good. The first voice then answered, "Sinners cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Go away!" Then the man said, "I hear you, but cannot see you. Who are you?" The voice answered, "I am Peter the Apostle." Then said the man, "O great Apostle, have pity on me a sinner. Remember the weakness of men. Were you not a disciple of Christ? Do you not remember his sorrow when you slept when he had asked you to watch and pray? So it was with me. Do you not remember that you denied him thrice; and that you wept bitterly? So it is with me. You cannot refuse to let me in." Peter's voice was silent. The sinner stood for a while outside the gate; and then knocked again asking to be admitted into paradise.

Then a second voice from behind the gate said, "Who is this man, and how did he live on earth?" And once again Satan told of the man's deeds - no, not one of them good. So, the second voice replied, "Sinners cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Go away!" Again, the man said, "I hear you, but cannot see you. Who are you?" The voice answered, "I am David, king and prophet." The sinner did not despair and said, "Have pity on me King David! "You possessed a kingdom, and honor and riches and many wives. Yet, when you saw another man's wife, you took her and sent her husband into battle to die. Nathan the prophet compared you to a rich man who slew the beloved lamb of a poor man. Do you not remember how you repented; and said, "I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before me." I have done the same. You cannot refuse to let me in." And the voice of David was silent. So, the man knocked again.

Then a third voice said, "Who is this man, and how did he live on earth?" And again, Satan told of the man's deeds - no, not one of them good. So, the third voice replied, "Sinners cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Go away!" Again, the man said, "I hear you, but cannot see you. Who are you?" The voice answered, "I am John, the beloved Disciple." Again, the sinner did not despair and said, "Peter and David knew of man's weakness and God's mercy; but you, John the Divine, who wrote that God is Love and said that men must love one another, how can you look upon me with hatred and drive me away? Either you must renounce what you have said, or loving me, you must let me enter into the kingdom of heaven." And the gates of heaven opened; and John embraced the repentant sinner and took him into paradise.

I often think about Jesus on the cross. He saw his mother and the Apostle John; his response was love: to commend her to the care of his beloved disciple. He saw the jeers and hatred of the priests, the scribes and the Pharisees; his response was love: he forgive them. He was crucified between two thieves. One of them taunted him; the other rebuked his fellow thief and asked Jesus to remember him when he entered into his kingdom. Jesus' response was love: *This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.*

In Thornton Wilder's masterpiece, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, a little Franciscan friar tries to make sense out of the tragic deaths of five people who fell into a deep gorge after the collapse of an Inca rope bridge in early eighteenth century Peru. He thoroughly investigates their lives and discovers God's loving handiwork that guided each of them towards his heavenly paradise. That is where our dearly beloved are (however they got there): heavenly paradise with the Good Thief, St. John, Nathan and King David and all the saints who have gone before us. But we are not separated by death. We will see them again. Wilder concluded his novel with these haunting words: ***There is a land of the living and a land of the dead – and the bridge is love.***