

Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Pentecost, November 11, 2018, Liturgical Year “B”

**St. Andrew’s Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Mark 12:38-44 1 Kings 17:8-16

***“The Image of God”***

I want to share with you what I experienced this past Thursday, Friday and Saturday in Tallahassee at St. Peter’s Cathedral. We first had a clergy conference at Holy Cross Church, about a mile and a half from the Cathedral, and it is always wonderful to re-connect with other Anglican clergy. I meet with Clergy from all over this county, but to get together with other Anglican clergy – like mind, like Spirit, like Word – it is very powerful. Many of these people I have known for a long time, way back in Jacksonville, when we lived there. I was junior and Senior Warden for Redeemer Episcopal Church, at the time. Our rector was now our Bishop, Bishop Neil Lebhar. On Thursday Night – our bishop decided to give us a wonderful gift, something that I know personally, I have not experienced. He held a very special service of renewing of Ordination vows – over 100 priests and deacons were present at this service. I want you to hear some of the words and promises made:

*Bishop Do you believe that the Holy Scriptures contain all doctrine required as necessary for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined, out of the Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge; and to teach nothing as necessary to eternal salvation but that which may be concluded and proved by the Scriptures?*

*Answer I believe it, and have so determined, by God’s grace.*

And then after other questions

*Bishop Will you reverently obey your Bishop, and other chief Ministers, who, according to the Canons of the Church, may have charge and authority over you, following with a glad mind and will their godly admonitions, and submitting yourself to their godly judgments?*

*Answer I will, the Lord being my helper.*

These promises speak loudly from the ones that I remember making 13 years ago December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2005 at St. John’s Cathedral, Jacksonville. My son and daughter were there, hearing these promises made. Those had been about pledging allegiance to the denomination and less about following the godly authority – driven by Holy Scripture. It was an amazing time, one in which I thanked our bishop saying it was great to ‘re-up!’

We had an amazing speaker, a renowned author and psychologist, Dr. James Osterhaus, who comes from Virginia, – of TAG Consulting Group, consulting to churches all over, and to the, and his name keeps popping up in a very interesting book Canoeing the Mountains – Christian Leadership in Unchartered Territory about Lewis and Clark – by Todd Bolsinger. On their western explorations they thought that canoes would carry them all the way to the Pacific – and it was enough – but then they ran into the Rocky Mountains. What do you do with a canoe when you are trying to get over the Rocky Mountains? You know what? It meant that the whole program changes – got to be flexible. That is sort of what is happening in the church today.

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There is a good reason that Jim’s name is all over that book -it is because Jim was Todd’s coach and mentor. Our Bishop thought why get Todd – when you can get the coach – so he brought the coach in, someone that he knows closely for over 30 years from Truro Church in Virginia. We had several sessions hearing Jim – whose humor and insight.

Our time in the conference was about prayer, everything we did was centered around prayer, reflection and learning. I got to thinking about my life – I got to thinking that prior to my Cursillo experience in 1998 - while I knew a lot about Jesus - it became apparent that I didn’t know Jesus. It was then that He came onto my heart and instead of worshipping Him from afar – I have Him right here, and would have Him with me every day of my life. It was a powerful time – a reminder of trails walked and sometimes run, with the Lord.

During the Diocesan Synod, which was from Friday night through yesterday afternoon, there was once again a great time of fellowship – seeing and sharing with people, not only clergy, but people from all over our expansive Diocese that covers South Florida, South GA, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas. I wish I had the Bishop’s frequent flyer miles, but I can tell you he is looking forward to the two-hour drive here in December. it is great to see people who are in love with our Savior – and are working hard to strengthen our church and Province – the Anglican Church in North America.

Our Deacons – Bob and Diane Millott were formally introduced as new clergy in our diocese. The word ‘provisional’ doesn’t go away as we are still waiting for the Oxford Background checks come back, and I have no doubt that they will be great – and then the ‘provisional’ should come down. But – when it was announced that they were in Ireland, and everyone was envious wishing that we were kissing the Blarney Stone as well! It was really wonderful as it was explained that they came from the Episcopal Church and serving here at St. Andrew’s – Douglas, GA.

It was very interesting to hear from some people who were explaining the state of the church. Did you know that 84 percent of American Christians accepted the Lord before their 22nd birthday? Even worse there is only a 4% chance that an American will ever come to Christ after their 22nd birthday! All ages are important – but we have got to grow the faith in our youth. That is one of the reasons we have Children’s Church and on Wednesday Night we have programs for the children. I promise you, we’ll have more expanding through the years as children grow.

I want to tell you the story, and then we will get to our Scripture. Our Deacon for youth in the Diocese is Dr. Jessica Jones. She told a story of girl at our Diocesan Camp Araminta this past summer. This young girl was sitting all by herself and seemed to not want to have any part of the others. The priest and deacon in charge met with her to try and see if they could help. The girl was not willing to share. At the art time she was painting pictures that were all solid black. A sheet of paper painted solid black. They came to a common ground in their conversation and

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it was her love for Harry Potter. Deacon Jessica shared her knowledge of Harry and Hogwarts – and a spark was lit. The next day her black pictures turned to rainbows. That is not the end of the story – because at a conference of youth leaders a young leader from South Florida shared about the transformation of a young girl – who found the love of Christ, and gave her life to Christ at that camp, in the fact that there were people who saw worth in her which turned her artwork from darkness to rainbows. Jessica burst into tears, and she did at the Synod because she recognized that Christ's love reached to this girl through the priest and herself. Talk about affirmation!

Driving to Tallahassee I saw evidence of the Hurricane. The storm was one month ago Saturday and the world has moved on - but the damage has not. I saw piles of wood from damaged trees along the side of the road. One month - the world has moved on but the damage has not. One church and surrounding homes and businesses are gone and won't rebuild due to fact that all of the members are no longer there. St. Paul's Anglican Church, Lynn Haven, Fl. is no more. The whole town was decimated – down to the ground. What is the priest to do? Where do people work when their place of work isn't there anymore? How can you go home when everything is gone? The Anglican Relief Development Fund – ARDF.org is available and on the ground and they are trying to help people. It is a part of Anglican Church of North America. If you want to know more – please speak with me later.

We were blessed to welcome a new congregation: Prince of Peace in Melbourne FL. We expect several more to be added next year.

Our bishop is indeed excited about coming to meet with you and for Confirmations, etc. December 16<sup>th</sup>.

In our Old Testament reading we heard about the Prophet Elijah and how he was instructed by God to go to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." When he got there the widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "*Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?*" As she was going to get it, he called, "*And bring me, please, a piece of bread.*" "As surely as the LORD your God lives," she replied, "*I don't have any bread--only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it--and die.*" Elijah said to her, "*Don't be afraid. Go home and make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'*" She went away and did as Elijah had told her to do. So, there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah." God is alive and well – even in the Old Testament!

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In our Gospel message we hear of another widow who came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. The point that Jesus wanted to make *"I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything--all she had to live on."* It wasn't about the amount but about the faith behind the giving and the spirit in which she gave.

I want to close today with the words of Jesus taken from Matthew 22:19-21. Jesus was asked if it was right to pay taxes to Caesar? Jesus knew they were trying to trap Him and He called them hypocrites for trying to trap Him. And so, He asked, *"Show me the coin used for paying the tax."* *They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."*

Jesus had them show Him the image on the coin and it was Caesar's image. He rightly told them to give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. Why didn't He show them God's image? He told them to give to God what is God's – but where was God's image? I know you might be thinking that He was sitting right in front of them – but I want to suggest to you that the image wasn't only sitting in front of them – but the image of God was sitting right in front of Jesus. We are all made, as God said in Genesis 1:2, *"Let us make man in our image, in our likeness."* Give to God what is God's. Jesus is not only talking about money here – but He is telling us to give of ourselves in service and faith to God. What is called incarnational ministry – the ministry of presence. We all have gifts. There are lots of things that we can do for the Kingdom of God. It could be the hand on the shoulder of someone who feels alone. It could be a smile – even at Harvey's! So many things. He is telling us to give of ourselves in service and in faith to God.