

THE LION

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Message from the Rector

“And let us consider one another ...

not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...”

Hebrews 10:24-25

Part 1

In his new book, *The Benedict Option*, author Rod Dreher offers not only a critique of the current state of our Western culture, in particular the Western culture here in the United States, but he also shows just how far the Church has imbibed in, and has now been shaped by, what he calls “liquid modernity.” According to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, until recent decades, our Western culture has been marked by what he calls a “solid modernity,” i.e., a period of social change that was still fairly predictable and manageable because the fundamental principles upon which that culture was built have been more or less steady from the beginning: Enlightenment thinking, undergirded and bounded by Biblical principles, regardless of how those principles were viewed by those living in that culture. In other words, even non-believers believed in, and generally lived their lives by, the concepts of truth, morality, virtue, and things like that. The result of this common belief in these core principles, Bauman notes, is what made cultural change fairly predictable and manageable.

Today, however, this is no longer the case. Our present condition is what Bauman calls a “liquid modernity,” meaning that we are living in a time when change is so rapid that no social institutions have time to solidify, nor are those changes fairly predictable, much less manageable. And the reason for this is simple: in large part, and more so with each passing year, the traditional Biblical undergirding and boundaries of our cultural development have been thrown off, and we now find ourselves free-wheeling in whichever direction those unbounded cultural winds happen to blow.

And if we don’t believe that, all we have to do is turn on the television to hear otherwise intelligent people talking about things like alternative facts, gender fluidity, moral relativism, self-defined virtue, self-defined reality, and things like that. As a matter of fact, we don’t even hear the old debates about whether or not there is really such a thing as “absolute truth” anymore for the simple reason that most people just take it for granted that it is not possible for such a thing to even exist. How can there be “absolute truth” when each person creates his or her own reality? And who is to say, anyway? But that is the culture in which we live: one that changes rapidly, day to day, because it has severed itself from its moorings and is now restlessly in search of a “something” that it can never find because that “something” changes each and every day. About the only constant is that it is a very egocentric and individual quest, with self-gratification directly in the center.

By the way, it is a self-refuting argument to say that there is no such thing as “absolute truth.” Extra points to the person who can tell me why.

This is the state of our society, in general, and unfortunately this restless unrootedness has made its way into the Church where many of us always seem to be on a quest for something new, something exciting, something novel, something interesting, something you-fill-in-the-blank. In other words, in our quest for self-fulfillment and self-satisfaction – egocentrism being one of the hallmarks of “liquid modernity – we move from place to place (i.e., congregation to congregation), looking for something new, something exciting, something novel, something interesting, something you-fill-in-the-blank.

In other words, what we have done is turned the Church into just another commodity, just another consumerist experience – which is exactly what our “liquid” culture has formed us to do. We truly are “children of our age.” And the result of this commodification is that, spiritually at least, we harm ourselves, we harm one another, we harm the local churches which we flit in and out of as the mood strikes (assuming that we are going to church at all: don’t forget, if church is viewed as a consumer experience, one of the choices that consumers have is to *not* choose at all), and we harm the Church. And not only that, what we wind up doing is simply adding to the instability of the culture around since all we are fundamentally doing is living our lives as one more contribution to the “liquidity” that marks it. I will speak more about these harmful effects later; but for us to criticize the state of our current culture, while at the same time reinforcing its problems by not really being any different from it, is either self-delusion at best, or hypocrisy at worst. Perhaps it is both.

Message from the Rector - Continued

Rod Dreher isn't, however, one of those prophetic voices that is quick to point out the problems that surround us without also trying to provide at least the beginning of a solution, and the solution that he proposes comes in the form of what he calls "the Benedict option." Taking his cue from philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, in his work on moral theory entitled *After Virtue*, Dreher argues that the only thing that will save the Church and, thereby, Christians in a culture that is now experiencing its death-rattle in the wake of its own cultural suicide, is "a new – doubtless very different – St. Benedict" (p. 4); and from there, Dreher paints a picture of what that this new Benedictine lifeboat might look like.

Contrary to what some of his critics charge, what Rod Dreher is *not* advocating is a complete withdraw from society in the face of a Christianity that has, in a very large part, capitulated to it. In other words, he isn't arguing that we need to all return to living behind monastery walls. What he does argue for, though, is the establishment of barriers that like those monastery walls put limits on culture's intrusion into both the Church and into our individual Christian lives, while at the same time fostering a deeper sense of what it means to really be a Christian in a culture that is increasingly hostile to our Christian faith each and every day. The answer to this dilemma, Dreher argues, might well be found in the fundamental elements of the *Rule* that St Benedict drafted for his monks almost 1500 years ago.

In addition to the fundamental elements found in almost all monastic rules, i.e, order, prayer, work, and certain ascetical practices such as abstinence and fasting, practices that not only help center our lives on God but also help break our addiction to self-indulgence and self-satisfaction, St. Benedict added three other elements to his rule: stability, community, and hospitality. While the first elements (order, prayer, work, and asceticism) are fundamental to all of Christian life, and have been addressed in sermons, lessons, and articles over the years, in this series of articles I plan to focus on the other three – stability, community, and hospitality – since they speak to our individual responsibilities to both the particular local body of Christians that we call "St Mark's" and our individual responsibilities to one another. Because of just how deeply many of us have been formed by the culture around us, some of my comments will no-doubt be uncomfortable, and some will no-doubt challenge, but all will show just how countercultural the Church simply must be if we are going to once again begin to lay a foundation for the future.

If Rod Dreher is right – and his isn't the only voice tolling the bell of the death of Christendom, especially here in the West – then we truly are entering a new Dark Ages. How we, the Church as well as individual churches, respond in the face of this death is certain to make all the difference in the days to come. In our lifetimes, we may never see a change in the course of our current cultural trajectory, but the only way to influence our culture's future course is to begin *now* to once again lay the foundation upon which our Christian culture can be reclaimed. May we all be found faithful in so doing, and as we are may our Lord bless our efforts for him.

Curate's Corner

Fr. Randall Russell

Have you ever wanted to visit the Holy Land? Even if the answer is no, there is probably a good chance that you know of a fellow Christian who would really like to go or who has already been. Many Christians who have visited the Holy Land often return home with stories and pictures of all the holy places they have been such as the hill where it is believed our Lord died or the tomb where it is believed our Lord was buried and rose again. So would you be at all surprised to learn that in the early Church there were many Christians who wanted to visit all of these holy sites as well?

From the earliest days of Christianity believers have flocked to the Holy Land in order to visit many of the places where it is believed certain events in Holy Scripture took place. However, the most popular place by far that early Christians often visited was the path our Lord took as He carried His cross through the city of Jerusalem on the first Good Friday. This holy pilgrimage was one that many early Christians made with great devotion, stopping at several points along the way in order to meditate and pray on a specific holy event that had likely taken place there. For example, since in Luke 23:28 we know that our Lord told the women of Jerusalem to not weep for Him but for themselves there would have been a shrine or a "station" along the way of the cross to commemorate that event.

The custom arose throughout Europe for those who were unable to make this popular pilgrimage of setting up replicas or shrines or "stations" of certain events along the Way of Sorrows in the church so that everyone could participate in a "spiritual" pilgrimage. After a long period of time, these little replicas or shrines or "stations" eventually became restricted to only fourteen and it is now customary to see them prominently placed along the walls of several Christian churches. In fact, up until fairly recently St. Mark's was one of the few churches in the Anglican Province of America to not have all fourteen stations prominently displayed upon its walls.

St. Mark's very own Stations of the Cross went up near the end of 2016. Father Mike has said that it was always the church's intention to have the Stations, but that there were never any Stations that seemed to match the beauty of the architecture of the church. The Stations of the Cross that may currently be seen at St. Mark's were all purchased from Catholic Supply of St. Louis and commissioned by Italian artists. All together the Stations cost twenty thousand dollars, half of which was raised by the congregation and the other half by matching funds from an anonymous

giver. The Stations were blessed for use in the Church on February 26, 2017, were used for the first time on March 8, 2017 and on every other Wednesday during the season of Lent, as well as on Good Friday.

Charles Garrett commissioned the frames for each individual Station out of walnut and mounted each one himself. Father Randall digitally put together a devotional booklet in order to help parishioners pray the Stations, which was later edited by Father Mike, printed by Father Randall, and physically bound together by Sheila Ward. The Stations of the Cross are a wonderful addition to the spiritual life of the church. They were used all throughout the season of Lent this year and will certainly continue to be used for many more years to come.

Music Notes

Kathleen Knott, Music Director/Organist

Have Thine Own Way, Lord!

Have Thine Own Way, Lord!

Vs. 1 Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still.

Vs. 4 Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Hold o'er my being absolute sway!
Till with Thy Spirit till all shall see
Christ only, always, living in me!

This hymn text with a reference to Isaiah 64:8 was written by Adelaide Pollard in 1902. These words came to mind when I was thinking about the ministry of our choir and bell ringers. Each of our music participants unselfishly gives of their time and talent to enhance worship in our church, and each brings a special talent to our group. Sherry Garrett is known as our "Choir Mother." She grew up singing as a child out of The 1940 Hymnal. She has a working knowledge of our Anglican music tradition and helps me select the hymns; in addition, she assists with organizing choir music and supervises robe selection for guest singers. Sheila and Sarah Ward are our "dynamic duo." They are always willing to step up and sing a solo or duet. Each of the Ward ladies has a giving spirit and a beautiful voice. As many of you know Sarah is becoming an outstanding oboist. Our beloved Geri Hart who will be returning to New York has been a wonderful addition to our soprano section. She loves to sing descants. Paul Dodson is especially appreciated for his pleasant personality and lovely voice. Mel Knott calls himself "Francis the Mule" and handles the duties of choir and hand bell set up. In addition, he works diligently every week to learn the music. Jay Philpott has been a blessed addition to our men's section, and he is knowledgeable regarding Anglican music and tradition.

Charlotte Hyzer and Linda Philpott joined the handbell choir several years ago. At the time they had not been exposed to reading or playing music. They have worked with diligence and dedication to learn to read notes and rhythms, and they have become competent ringers. Amy Russell has ringing and singing experience and is always willing to step in to help out with special music. Keith Vittitoe is an experienced percussionist and did a beautiful job of playing handbells on Christmas Eve.

As you can see and hopefully hear, we have many folks to be thankful for in St. Mark's music ministry. They have allowed God to mold them into integral participants in His church. As the choir and ringing season comes to an end for the summer, we thank God for providing these willing music participants.

Treasurer Report

Cal Brown

As we wind down the season and our winter congregation heads home, it's time to review our first four months of giving and plan for the rest of the year. We thank our many seasonal members for their wonderful contributions to St. Mark's and at this point, we have met our existing budget needs.

It is now time for our year round members to step up to the plate, freely giving according to their ability. I heard an interesting quote from a pastor the other day. His church was striving to meet their budget needs. On Sunday, he announced to the members: "I have good news and bad news. The good news is we have found the money. The bad news is it's still in your pockets!" Is this the case with St. Mark's?

Several members have taken the challenge to increase their pledge/giving, but many have not. Each of you knows this is our Church. Only our members can support its expenses through our giving. God wants St. Mark's to be a healthy successful church doing His work on a daily basis.

To meet our expenses each month, member giving needs to exceed \$30,000.00 per month. While we have plenty of assets, (and no liabilities except for current expenses), assets do not pay the bills. Each month there is maintenance, supplies, outreach, payroll, etc. to pay. In three to five years, we will need a new roof and we should be collecting excess funds to pay for this project.

St. Mark's should be and is healthy spiritually and financially. Part of being spiritually healthy is tithing.

Upcoming Holy Days

June/July/August/September Holy Days

June 12 (noon) – Feast of St Barnabas

June 24 (10:00 a.m.) – Nativity of St John the Baptist

June 29 (noon) – Feast of St Peter, Apostle

July 04 (10:00 a.m.) – Independence Day

July 25 (noon) – Feast of St James the Apostle

August 24 (noon) – Feast of St Bartholomew the Apostle

September 21 (noon) – Feast of St Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

September 29 (noon) – Feast of St Michael and All Angels

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