

22 June, 2008
The Rev. David Andrews

It is a true joy for me to be with you this morning. It's been a long time. For those of you who were between 1983 and '84 I was the seminary intern. I had a full beard back then and glasses... I was 27, I'm now 50. I must tell you, though, that the wedding present you gave Emily and I – the microwave – still works. It's 24 years old; it's one of those big Amanas. When we moved to Maine, the movers said, "What's the serial number on this? 001?"

So a lot has happened in the last 24 years. When I left here in August of '84, ordination was denied for six years. You may remember I had come from the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

I was in the process in the diocese of Southern Ohio, went back to New Jersey and Emily and I were married the week after I was here (after I left) and we came back for a reception that you all put on.

In that year things happened and by the spring of '85, ordination was denied. I spent six years very much in the wilderness, especially two and a half years after leaving here, pretty much giving up the Church and feeling somewhat abandoned by both God and the Church. But it all came around full circle.

Since that time, living in New Jersey and then in New York and just recently on the coast of Maine in Castine, where I'm the rector of Trinity Episcopal Church. If you've ever been to Castine or been to the down-east coast of Maine, Castine is on its own little peninsula where we overlook Penobscott Bay. It's a tough gig. I'm very fortunate and grateful to be there, but I'm also glad to be here with you this morning.

I'm in Seattle until next Friday, before I fly back to Maine. [I'm] participating in the Church Development Institute which is at Trinity Episcopal Parish in Seattle. Church Development Institute has been around for quite some time. Actually beginning in New York and other parts of the country, but it was on Deer Isle, Maine for a few years before it moved to Seattle three years ago. It is a two-week course. In terms of using the themes of organizational development and applying them to church administration and church development in order for parishes to become healthy. Or look at the issues and interventions that can occur to allow churches to live into the mission that we are called to as baptized people.

One of the models that is used to try to analyze that is a model that I am very fond of and attracted to these days: The Church is used as the foundation. In the Church, all of us baptized people, living in the baptismal promises of the baptismal covenant and from that our worship, our studies, our prayer; our evangelism and our stewardship are all grounded in the Church – not just the building but in the community.

And from that, all of us moving out of that place, that safe place, the foundation, to our lives in the world. To our lives as apostles, as the apostolate, where we bring all that we learn here, all that we do here, to our relationships, to our work, to our civic life. To our church, as well, and to our jobs. And that those things – what we learn here – impacts and forms what we do out in the world.

And that's where I think the gospel is this morning. Especially the whole entire gospel of Jesus in this morning's lesson. He is teaching the disciples to go out and live in the world, and what they can expect and how they are to live. To live by grace and love and forgiveness, realizing that there will be conflicts. It will not be easy; it will not always be fun. In fact, there will be times of great desolation and discouragement, but yet they trust that God will be with them in the midst of those times as well as in times of joy.

For some reason the prayer book lectionary we know of and use in Maine – the revised common lectionary - includes that last piece of the gospel there where Jesus is talking about 'I am not come to bring peace, but to bring a sword...I come to bring division amongst family members'. Hard sayings. Difficult to try to interpret for today, but I don't think Jesus is talking about a violent division. Rather I think he's talking about that piece of what I mentioned earlier – the fact that we go out from this place into the world to live out the baptismal promises. Not everybody in the world wants to hear that. Not in a world which is totally consumed with business, with competition, with survival of the fittest.

Folks don't always want to hear the message of grace and love and forgiveness. So that's where I think the division happens for us. We all want to be liked. We want to be good. But the message of Jesus sometimes calls us to be counter-intuitive, counter-cultural, to think outside the box if you will. To bring others in who may not find us very attractive at the moment or have never experienced the true power of the gospel.

The other part of the cycle, the circle, is that from our daily lives we then go back into the church. In many ways we are deaconal in that we bring what we hear and what we see and what we feel out in the world back into the church to let the church know what is going on. It is wonderful that you have John Ackermann as your deacon. (We've both gotten older.) But it's wonderful that you have a deacon in this parish to inform you, to communicate to you the needs of the world. But with that, it is also very difficult for us to do.

At the end of the gospel this morning, Jesus talks about losing one's life to carry his cross. To bring all that burdens us, all that burdens him, to bring that – to take that on, so that we might gain new life.

The thing with the sword that I read this week? Again, we see the sword as a very violent image, but rather I invite you to see the sword – if you put the sword on its steel head, we have the cross. That's the crossbeam, that's what we carry. So when we are finding ourselves to be discouraged or hopeless about what's happening in the world or

in the church today may we be reminded that what we carry into our lives, into the world, is that love and that vulnerability that Christ models for us on a regular basis.

I'd like to quote and share with you a poem by St. John of the Cross, from the middle ages, entitled "*Via Negativa*":

To reach satisfaction in all
 Desire its possession in nothing.
To come to possess all
 Desire the possession of nothing.
To arrive a being all
 desire to be nothing.
To come to the knowledge of all
 desire the knowledge of nothing.
To come to the pleasure you have not
 you must go by a way in which you enjoy not.
To come to the knowledge you have not
 you must go by a way in which you know not.
To come to the possession you have not
 you must go y a way in which you possess not.
To come to be what you are not
 you must go by a way in which you are not.
When you turn toward something
 you cease to cast yourself upon the all.
For to go from all to the all
 you must deny yourself of all in all.
And when you come to the possession of the all
 you must possess it without wanting anything.
Because if you desire to have something in all
 your treasure in God is not purely your all.

May we leave this place this morning and be for you, my invitation as it is an invitation for me, to continue that cycle. To go to places which may not want to hear what we have to say. To be open to opening the container of the spirit to include new things, new ways of being, new ways of being communicative, new ways of sharing what we have to offer – the richness of this tradition, the Anglican tradition, to the world that is hungry. That needs, desires what we have to offer, but to do it in ways that are different as you do. And may that container be without walls that are firm but rather are vulnerable and allowed to be seeping out into the rest of the world. May we then lose our lives so that we might gain them in Christ.

Amen.