

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

November is essentially the end of the ecclesiastical year. It has been a good year for us and we'll end on a positive note. Bishop Grundorf will be here on All Saints' Day for his episcopal visit and to preach, celebrate the Holy Eucharist, and administer the Sacrament of Confirmation. Please be sure to be in church that Sunday to greet him and his wife and join us for the scrumptious reception that will follow the 10:00 a.m. service. November the 8th will be "Stewardship Sunday" where we will talk about the financial state of the parish and our need to support the work of the church with our financial gifts. And then on November 22nd we will have our annual meeting. *Remember, there will be just one service that Sunday at 9:00 a.m.!* A breakfast will be served and we will "eat and meet" in the parish hall (*not* in the church as usual). Our annual Thanksgiving Day Mass will be celebrated at the usual time of 10:00 a.m. At this service we'll have the opportunity to stand up and give thanks to God for something if we so desire. This and Christmas Day have always been among my favorite services of the year. Please be sure to be at each of these special services this month. *Your participation and presence at them is extremely important!*

I also want to thank Mr. Glock for his phenomenal playing this past year! It has been a year now that he has been with us, and his artistry has greatly improved the quality of our worship. The singing at St. Alban's has become really phenomenal! And even the responses have improved. It was only a year or so ago that some parishioners who normally attended the 10:00 a.m. service commented to me on how much more enthusiastic the 8:00 a.m. service was by comparison. They specifically mentioned how the responses were said enthusiastically and with great vigor at the early service, while at the late service they were barely mumbled. But now the 10:00 a.m. service has caught up, and in some cases even surpassed the earlier service in its ardor and zeal! I believe a lot of that has to do with Warren's fantastic musical ability. We are really blessed to have him, and I hope that each and every one of us that goes to that service takes time to *thank him* for all that he brings to this parish.

At our upcoming annual meeting we will elect two new vestrymen to serve in that ministry. Rich Burt and Janet Okutoyi are stepping down as their three-year term has come to an end. I thank them for their faithful service. Nominated to replace them are Kristi Sjöholm-Sierchio and Jason Taylor. Both Kristi and Jason are very active in the church and diligently serve the Lord with their time, treasure, and talent both here and in the larger community. I thank them for their willingness to serve in this position and pray God's grace upon them as they, Lord willing, are elected by the church at the annual meeting.

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

J. Gordon Anderson

November 2015

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UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

November 26th - Thanksgiving Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

November 30th - St. Andrew

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

December 16th, 18th, 19th - Advent Ember Days

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

December 21st - St. Thomas

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

December 24th - Christmas Eve

Holy Communion at 5:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

December 25th - Christmas Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

December 26th - St. Stephen

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

December 28th - Holy Innocents

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

January 6th - Epiphany

Holy Communion at 6:30 p.m.

STRATEGIC PLANNING: *Whither Saint Alban's?*

Years ago, during my senior year of high school, my parents decided that we were going to move from our home of thirteen years in Randallstown, MD to a 200 year old stone farmhouse in Freeland, MD on a sizable piece of acreage near Prettyboy Reservoir. But there was just one catch to this house: it hadn't been occupied for over thirty years. It was literally in field with no driveway to get to it. Vines were growing up the sides of the house and into the windows. The inside was repulsive... musty and extremely dirty. Junk was strewn everywhere. My folks were so excited that this was going to be their new home. My sister and I however were less excited because the place was just plain gross. I think she was glad that she was in college and would not have to live there, and I was glad to be graduating from high school and going to college out of state so I didn't have to live there... at the "War Torn Farm" as I called it. But unfortunately for us we could not get away from the house that easily. We learned that my dad was not going to hire a general contractor to restore the house. Instead he (read "we") was going to do most of the work. So on many weekends from the summer of 1991 to the spring of 1992 we all trekked up to the house to haul off junk, paint, hang drywall, etc. The result? Today the house and grounds look spectacular. Everything inside is gorgeously decorated. A large pond was later added to the property in the foundation of an old smoke house, and various outbuildings and foundations were converted to usable space. Mom planted amazing gardens all over the property that still amaze visitors today. What happened there? How did the "war torn farm" turn into such an incredible oasis? The answer is simple: my parents had a *vision* for what that property could be. When they looked at it they did not see merely a "war torn farm" with a bunch of derelict buildings, and house being eaten alive by a naughty wisteria. Rather, they saw what could become a gorgeous, park-like homestead. And then they worked really hard to bring that vision to fruition and create a true family home that we all enjoy today.

In same way that my folks had a vision for their property, I have a vision for Saint Alban's Church. Just as my mom and dad's property had the potential to be so much more than what it was, so it is with Saint Alban's. What is Saint Alban's like now? We are a small church with a cute and nicely-appointed - but tiny - building. What else? Well, people here are happy here. The folk that make Saint Alban's their church home and taken the time and made the effort to get involved are very satisfied being part of our community. This is the kind of stuff they say about Saint Alban's: It is a *friendly* parish. It is a *caring* parish. The church welcomes children and families. We

have a gorgeous liturgy. The singing and music sounds like we are in a cathedral. Many different activities are offered. St. Alban's is a place where we are challenged in our faith in God. St. Alban's is a place of refuge (spiritual, emotional, physical, and more). We sing a huge variety of hymns and service music. People have learned more about God and the Bible at St. Alban's than they have learned in their whole lives. We are a diverse parish in terms of our demographics. The larger community appreciates our ministry to them. I can exercise my spiritual gifts at St. Alban's. And on, and on. The point in mentioning that is not to pat ourselves on the back but rather to raise the following question: *if we have been blessed so much by being part of each other's lives and sharing our faith and life with each other in the context of our parish, would it not be a great thing to invite other people into this fellowship?* In other words, we know what we are now... but what can we become in the future?

Right now we are a lot like the quaint, romantic stone farmhouse nestled in the sleepy valley waiting to be transformed into something bigger and better, so that *even more* people may be come to know God and Christ, and be blessed as *we* have been blessed. To that end I envision Saint Alban's one day having a better, more accessible building with the room and facilities to reach people for Christ: meeting rooms, office space, choir room, etc. I envision having a parish administrator so that the clergy can focus on ministry and mission, not paperwork. I envision having a youth ministry for all ages. I envision having a regular choir. I envision church supporting more missions and missionaries, and our members going on mission trips. I envision having more outreach to the marginalized in our community (at risk youth, the elderly, etc.). We indeed do a lot of great things now that touch so many lives. What if we were to build on that and try to expand that? Wouldn't God be glorified even more? Wouldn't his kingdom become more apparent to us and to others?

But just as it took regular, intentional commitment and hard work for my parents and the whole family to turn their country home into a livable space, so it will take all of that on our part to transform Saint Alban's into a more prominent and vital witness for Christ in our community. Will you commit to God and help Saint Alban's survive, grow, prosper, and transform - all for the love of Christ and for the sake of his Holy Gospel? Will you invest the time, talent, and treasure that it will take to get Saint Alban's to the next level? Our world is more than ever in need of Christ. We Jesus to many people now. Let's magnify that and enlarge and expand our outreach and bring him to even more people! ☩

STEWARDSHIP: "A Sermon on Tithing" by the Rt. Rev'd Stephen C. Scarlett

A. SIN AND THE HUMAN VOCATION

We are in the Octave of All Saints. All Saints is a sort of "catch-all" feast for unknown holy people who don't have their own day. However, since we are all called to be saints (1 Corinthians 1:2), it is, prophetically, our own feast day. The "multitude which no man could number of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues" (Revelation 7:9) is a timeless vision of all who persevere in faith through tribulation and stand victorious before God's throne.

This is, "The Communion of the Saints;" the fellowship of all who are bound together in Christ through the Spirit. It consists of all believers, whether they are currently living in the body or in the intermediate state, awaiting the resurrection. The restoration of our relationship with God in Christ necessarily restores us to union with all who belong to him.

Sin severed our union with God; but is also alienated us (and continues to alienate us) from each other. After the original sin, the next sin was that one human being killed another — a murder that was a result of offerings made to God. Cain made an offering that was rejected by God. Abel made an offering that was accepted. For that reason, Cain killed Abel (Genesis 4:1-8). In Christ, this pattern is reversed. When we turn from sin and put our faith in Jesus, our offering is accepted; and, rather than killing each other, we are reconciled and learn to work for one another's good.

Redemption in Christ restores us to the vocation that we lost through sin. We were made to be priests and kings of the creation. We were made to take the creation that God gave us and offer it back to God in thanksgiving; and we were made to rule over the creation righteously. The paradox is that only when we give the creation back to God as an offering in thanksgiving — only when we let go of the creation — do we fully possess it and rule over it. When we hold on to the creation, it becomes an idol, and it rules over us.

B. THE STORY OF CAIN AND ABEL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS.

Let us look at the story of Cain and Abel. Genesis tells us, "In the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering." (Genesis 4:3-5).

The language of Genesis 4 suggests the problem. Abel offered the first and best of his flock. In the Bible, the first and best represents the whole. By this offering, Abel exercised his priestly duty. He took what God had given him and he offered it back to God in thanksgiving. God accepted Abel and his offering. Cain brought "an offering." Cain knew he was supposed to give, but did not want to; so he brought something he thought he could spare. This attitude is a consequence of the fall. Fallen man says of the creation, "This is mine." He clings tightly to the creation as though he were the owner and not a steward; as though it was a possession and not a gift. As Hebrews says, "By faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts" (11:2).

Throughout the Bible, the righteous follow in Abel's footsteps by giving back to God the first and best of what God gives to them. The first and best is represented by the tithe. Abraham tithed to Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18-20). Jacob made the following vow to God: "Of all that thou givest me I will surely give the tenth to thee" (Genesis 28:20-22). Various tithes were established in the Torah, the chief of which went to support the ministry of the Priests and Levites in the temple (Leviticus 27:30-32). At the end of the Old Testament, when the temple languished because Israel neglected to tithe, God accused his people of robbing him. God promised that if his people would repent and give the tithe he would pour down his blessing upon them (Malachi 3:8-12). In the New Testament Jesus criticized the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees, but he commended their meticulous practice of tithing (Matthew 23:23). It is the will of God that the ministry of the church, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit and the successor to the Old Testament temple, be supported by the tithes of the people of God.

C. TITHING AND TRUSTING GOD.

We tithe when we take the income God gives to us and give the first tenth as an offering to God. The tithe should be the first check we write. This is how we imitate Abel and offer God our first and or best. This is one way we fulfill our vocation as priests of the creation.

Some will say, "I can't afford to tithe." Of course, this is literally false; the first and best are always there to give. What this really means is, "I am afraid that if I tithe I won't have enough left over for the rest of my needs." This is precisely (*continued on the next page*)

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what makes the tithe an expression of faith. We give God the first and best trusting that God will make the rest sufficient to meet our needs. As Hebrews says, "Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb 11:6).

God's faithfulness is illustrated by the story of the prophet Elijah and widow of Zarephath. During a severe famine, God sent Elijah to the widow to ask for food. She told Elijah that she only had a little food. She was about to prepare for herself and her son as a sort of last meal before they died of hunger. Elijah told her, "Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son. For thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'The bin of flour shall not be used up, nor shall the jar of oil run dry, until the day the LORD sends rain on the earth.'" 1 Kings tells us, "She went away and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and her household ate for many days. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah" (1 Kings 17:8-16). The widow gave first to God, and the rest was made sufficient to meet her needs.

D. THE CORPORATE DIMENSION OF TITHING.

The mission of our church is, "To follow Christ, to worship God every Sunday in his church, and to work and pray and give for the spread of his kingdom" (BCP p. 291) This means that it is the mission of each of us to use our gifts in service, take our part in church's life of prayer and support the church with our tithes—and with other offerings as we are able.

Our participation in the mission of the church is not just for our own benefit; it is our part of the mission and work of the church. If any of us fails to do our part, the mission of the church is less powerful than it ought to be. The church is the army of God; if any soldier in God's army does not man his post and fulfill his calling, we are less able to fight and conquer the enemy.

People sometimes ask how they can help the church; they are looking for some special thing they can do. However, what the church really needs is not so much the periodic act of heroism; what the church

really needs is for all of its members to be committed to our mission; to be faithful in the regular habits of following Christ, worshiping God and working, praying and giving for the spread of his kingdom.

Ordinary faithfulness makes people heroes in the church. What God has done through the ministry of St. Matthew's Church has been made possible by those who have been faithful, year in and year out, to take their part in our mission. This is particularly true with regard to money. We have always been able to do more than what our size would suggest because so many of our people have been faithful in their tithing. We have often had year-end deficits erased by people who experienced financial blessing from God and, as always, were faithful to give. Expansion of our ministry has been made possible by new people who join us and begin to support our ministry with their tithe.

We are committed as a church to mission. We believe that God is calling us to reach out beyond ourselves and share with others what God has given to us. A church that merely wants to survive—that merely wants to pay the bills for another year—might sustain itself with an offering of some of the left over grain. But a church with a mission, the army of God dressed for battle, requires our first and our best, our tithe.

Think of the church as a canoe and of each member as an oarsman. When all row in harmony, the mission of the church moves forward efficiently and effectively. When some choose not to row, others have to row harder to make up for those who do not row. When some are difficult, others have to row harder to make up for the oars that are dragging in the water. As we begin to plan for next year, we are asking all of our members to get on board and row with us. We believe is calling us to do great things. The more people who get on board and row with us, the more people who work and pray and give for the spread of the kingdom, the greater will be the works that God will do through us. ✠

Bishop Scarlett is rector of St. Matthew's Church in Newport Beach, CA. He is bishop ordinary of the Diocese of the Holy Trinity, Anglican Catholic Church. This sermon is reprinted by permission.