

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH SERVING WATERLOO, BELGIUM

Chausée de Charleroi 2 1420 Braine-l'Alleud, Belgium +32 2 384 7780

**Sermon Preached by the Presiding Bishop at the Closing Eucharist
of the Annual Convention of the Convocation of Churches in Europe
All Saints Church
19 October 2008
Proper 24, Year A RCL**

If you remember the readings from last week, after the wandering Hebrews had melted down their earrings to make a golden calf to worship, God was telling Moses that now those people were his problem. God was finished with them, and Moses was going to have to be responsible. But the story ends like this, “and the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.” Now in the part of the story we heard today, Moses is trying to make sure that God takes those people back. Moses is looking for reassurance, and he and God have a long interchange about names and identity, and finally Moses asks to see God face to face. God reminds Moses that no one gets to do that in this life, and offers to let Moses see him in passing. In one sense, all Moses gets to see is God’s retreating backside.

That’s actually the way most of us see the evidence of God’s presence – we can tell in retrospect, or by looking askance, or in some way other than by looking directly at God, even if we could manage to do that in this life. That’s what that bit in Eucharistic prayer C is about, where we pray that God might “open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us.”

One of the stories I heard here this week spoke almost literally about seeing God passing by. Several of you talked about and said the experience with the first pilgrimage of the Canterbury Cross, that it was like “being overtaken by the Holy Spirit.” There is something about that story that captures the story of this convocation, over and over and over again.

Your work at this gathering has built on work begun in *Transformed by Stories*, and will continue as you return to your varied locations. All of the story-telling has been about identity and how that identity is being lived out in mission. And those issues of identity and mission are directly related to seeing God passing by, or discovering where God is already at work. That is the evidence of God that Moses and we can see face to face.

Identity is being discovered as you tell stories about why it’s important to be a Christian in this place, at this time in history, and in this tradition. You are recognizing evidence of God at work in the ways you image God to each other. When one of you says that what drew you was a community formed around worshiping in English, you are saying something about coming home, whether English is the language of your childhood or more mature years. Some of you have said that even though this is your native land, you have found a spiritual home in a tradition that has its more recent roots in English-speaking lands. And some of you you have a conscious and intentional community built around discovering the image of God in your midst. You know the deep treasure of discovering Christ when two or three or ten are gathered together in his name, even when they come from different places and speak different languages. You know the treasure of restless wanderers who find rest and home in God. You know yourselves as folk on the road, with a loved one in a foreign land, or have come home to a bunch of foreigners.

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Choosing where to look for God and God's presence also lies behind Jesus' controversy with the coin. The denarius that the Pharisees offer him bears the image of the emperor, and for those who can read, it says this: "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, and high priest." Jesus' point about taxes is that it should be obvious who this piece of metal belongs to – and also that it is an idol, and Jews aren't supposed to worship human constructs. This idol is no different than the earrings turned into a golden calf. But Jesus' controversy may invite us to look for evidence of God passing by in unlikely places – maybe even in the uses to which that coin is put. Where do we see the image of God? Certainly in human beings, made in the image of God: "male and female he created them." It's less explicit, but the rest of creation must also in some way bear the image of the creator, for how could God create anything that does not in some way reflect divine creativity and the gift of life? Anything that expresses love in some way must bear the mark of God's creative "hand at work in the world about us."

Being the expressive love of God in the world about us is the mission part of the convention's larger conversation. Mission is about how the coin gets put to work, for in the subversive ways of the gospel, the coin that Caesar claims can also be a tool for building the reign of God. That is a good part of what advocacy for the MDGs is all about. The EU deliberations about international aid, about climate change and carbon credits are for the people in Europe a way to direct how the coin is spent. And it is clear that there is a surprising degree of receptivity to advice from those outside the circle of government officials! The treaty of Lisbon says so explicitly. The prophetic tradition has always insisted that the coin of government and national policy is an essential a tool for building the reign of God.

But the missional story is also about how the human coin is spent – those in this room, those who will hear the stories of this gathering in the coming days and weeks, and those who have not yet heard any story with much good news in it. Your mission dreams for this convocation have had success beyond your wildest dreams in the last several years. Often that awareness only comes after the fact, when you can see that God has indeed passed by.

We all have the ability to spend the human and created coin that bears the image of God, including the coin of Caesar, so that others can find their homes in God – if we can use it as a tool and not an idol.

Finding home is certainly the subject when God says to Moses, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." When you find the voice and space to tell them, your own stories about exile and searching for home become abundant evidence of God passing by. And when you've noticed that evidence, it brings an urgency to gather others in – and share the rest of home with the restless.

The existence of All Saints in this place has been the result of human coin, and Caesar's coin, being put to work in the cause of mission. This facility is a blessing, and will continue to be a blessing rather than a burden, as long as it continues to bless the larger community, as long as it is home for the nations, not just for you. The beginnings of a welcome center in this place are in part the result of Gen. Wilson's passion for caring for military personnel. This congregation is in the early stages of offering a divine homecoming and rest to some of the most stressed people around us.

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Your bishop's invitation to advocate for resettling Iraqi refugees in France is more evidence of God passing by. A need was noticed, one voice asked for help, that need elicited a willing response, and now governments are actually moving to invite the homeless and stateless to find a home in the midst of Europe. Your stories about that may help those of us in the United States challenge our own government to do the same.

Içi, ce n'est pas seulement l'église de "tous les saints," c'est "chez nous" ou "l'abri de dieu."

And it's not just the Convocation of American or Episcopal Churches in Europe that is a divine home. When we're conscious of seeking the divine, we discover that we are all truly standing in the cleft in the rock, watching God pass by. May we be spent in leading others home.

Katharine Jefferts Schori
Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church

Please read the excellent article about the Convocation Convention:

Storytelling transforms Europe's Episcopalians;
new convention model hailed a success
Presiding Bishop joins convocation delegates in Waterloo, Belgium
October 20, 2008

By Matthew Davies, editor of Episcopal Life Online and Episcopal Life
Media correspondent for the Anglican Communion.

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/79901_101727_ENG_HTM.htm