

Sunday, October 05, 2025

The Feast of the Anniversary of the Dedication of the Church

Procession and Solemn Eucharist with the Admission of Head and Deputy Head Choristers, Prefects, and a Chorister
11:00 am

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A Sermon by
The Rev. Canon Carl Turner

on

1 Chronicles 29:6-19; Ephesians 2:19-22

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'The Way of Jesus – the Way of Love.'

From our Old Testament Lesson: David prayed to the Lord, *"who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you."*

Why do we celebrate the anniversary of the Dedication of a Church? Because, in the words of Bishop Michael Curry, *"we are called to become the Beloved Community whose way of life is the way of Jesus and his way of love."* ^[1]

In my weekly message that went out with our newsletter yesterday, I talked about the dedication of this beautiful building. It was built through the free-will offerings of parishioners and those who believed in Saint Thomas Church and its place on Fifth Avenue and 53rd Street over 100 years ago. Around 3000 years ago, King David made provision for the first Temple – the first permanent House of the Lord – by asking all the leaders of the ancestral houses to give generously and to ask their tribes to contribute according to their own wealth. In biblical terms, it became the mother of all capital campaigns! And what a success it was!

Then the leaders of ancestral houses made their freewill offerings, as did also the leaders of the tribes, the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and the officers over the king's work. ... Then the people rejoiced because these had given willingly, for with single mind they had offered freely to the LORD; King David also rejoiced greatly.

Now, notice how in response David prays to the Lord. He doesn't say, "Look what a successful portfolio manager I have become!" He says, *"who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to make this freewill offering? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you."* In other words, he acknowledges the centrality of God in the lives of his people – of the community – and that all of this offering belonged to God in the first place! His prayer is filled with humility; of recognizing, to use his own words, the 'transient' nature of his people.

"all things come from you, and of your own have we given you."

Our Mission statement will be the basis for our annual appeal not just for next year, but for the coming three years as we explore the three verbs used in that mission statement: **Worship, Love, and Serve**. Now, it may be tempting to think that at the heart of our mission statement is the 'Anglican Tradition and our unique choral heritage.' They are, my friends, what give Saint Thomas its particular character or charism, but **they are not at the heart of our mission Statement**. The heart of our mission statement is the name of a person – **Jesus Christ!** Jesus is at the heart of our mission statement and, therefore, everything that we do including our annual appeal has to be centered on Jesus. Everything that we do flows from our commitment to Jesus Christ and our baptismal covenant in which we commit ourselves to being a beloved community.

Why did Jesus drive out those selling animals, and overturn the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple? Their role, after all, was to help the people do their duty. I think Jesus drove them out and overturned the tables because those same people had forgotten their vocation and the whole purpose of their role in the Temple – that it was *God's House*, and the sacrifices and offerings were for *his* benefit not theirs. It was not a marketplace where people could satisfy their own selfish ends; their own desires; and also get rich at the same time.

In a similar way, Jesus is asking you and me why we come *here* and what we are doing here. If we only place our trust in this building (beautiful as it is), or in our Anglican tradition (uplifting as it is), or in our Choir of Men and Boys and the Choir School (unique though they are), then we may all short of living out our mission here on Fifth Avenue and 53rd Street. All those things are important, but they are a *means* to an end, not ends in themselves. They help us to worship, love, and serve Jesus!

King David's response to the enormity of the success of his capital campaign to build the first Temple was...**humility and a recognition of the sovereignty of God**: *"I know, my God, that you search the heart, and take pleasure in uprightness; in the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you."*

In my weekly message to you all yesterday, I mentioned Bishop Greer's sermon at this Church's consecration on April 25th, 1916. He took for his text James 1:22, *"Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers his only."* The Christian Church, the bishop told the congregation, faced the challenge of taking *"its old historic creed"* and making it alive in every aspect of life, not merely the personal but the social, the national, and the worldwide. Only in this way would the church regain *"its own distinctive work and mission,"* one *"that will differentiate it at once and by a leap from every other social organization on the face of the earth."* The Church, Bishop Greer maintained, was intended to be *"an incarnation in the world, the incarnation of God, and so continue in the world the Incarnate Jesus Christ."*

Just listen to those words again: The Church is intended to be **an incarnation in the world, the incarnation of God, and so continue in the world the Incarnate Jesus Christ**.

Now you see why our mission statement is so important, because it places **Jesus** at the center of it! Our mission is to do exactly what Bishop Greer encouraged our forebears to do – to continue in the world the Incarnate Jesus Christ. Not an abstract theory; not a precious traditionalism dressed up in cloth of gold; but the very person of Jesus Christ who gave us a new commandment to love one another as he has loved us.

Our worship of God will help us build a beloved community where love is at the center, and that love of Christ will help us serve one another and those around us.

And to those of you on-line – you are part of Bishop Greer's prophecy of almost 110 years ago when he said "*not merely the personal but the social, the national, and the worldwide*. I need you to respond also to our annual appeal – to pledge a regular amount so that our mission and ministry can flourish and we can draw more people into the orbit of Christ's love. Simply go to the website today and make a pledge or use the **QR code** that is on your screens now and will remain there until after the offertory.

So, as we begin to explore what it means to be a worshipping, loving, and serving community centered on Jesus Christ, let us listen again to the words of the Epistle – Paul writing to the Church in Ephesus:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

In him, the whole structure is joined together.

Or, as Bishop Curry said, we are called to become the **Beloved Community** whose way of life is the way of Jesus and his way of love.

PLEDGE TODAY

References

- 1 The Most Rev. Michael Curry: *Statement on the 20th Anniversary of 9/11* in New York.
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