

Holy Communion Newsletter

Teachings & Reflections



*The Holy Scriptures:
Hear, read, mark, learn,
and inwardly digest them,
that we may embrace and ever hold fast
the blessed hope of everlasting life.*

(Common Prayer)

Advent 2023: *A publication of Holy Communion Anglican Church
Reviewed by The Reverend Nathan Stomberg, Rector*

*The Mission
of
Holy Communion Anglican Church
is to proclaim
the Gospel of Jesus Christ
and
worship Him
in
Word and Sacrament.*

*Holy Communion Anglican Church
is an autonomous
Christian Congregation
grounded in the
Liturgical,
Theological,
and
Ministerial Traditions
of the
Anglican Heritage.*

Mark your Calendar!!!

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Saturday, December 23rd
Holy Eucharist: 5:00 p.m.

Christmas Eve

Sunday, December 24th
Holy Eucharist: 5:00 p.m.

First Sunday after Christmas

Sunday, December 31st
Holy Eucharist: 5:00 p.m.

An Epiphany Open House

Saturday, January 6th at 5:00 p.m.

at the home of

Bob and Barbara Bickerstaff

17 Campbell Street, West Warwick

Please join with your church family and friends
for an evening of food and fellowship.

Bring an appetizer or dessert to share

and

Invite a Friend!!

RSVP to Barbara at 714-2360 or
babickerstaff@yahoo.com

Faith that Speaks Louder than Words

The Rev. Nathan Stomberg, *Rector*

As we rejoiced with the Faithful departed this past All Saints' Sunday, I could not help but reflect on the life and witness of my late paternal grandfather, Raymond Stomberg, who went on to be with the LORD in September 2022. For all the feast days we observe throughout the church year, All Saints' Day stands apart as a feast not only for those Christian heroes who get their own stained-glass windows, but also for the heroes of the Faith in our own lives, our faithful loved ones who finished the race before us. Though he may not have his own stained-glass window, my grandfather's faithful witness had a much greater impact on my faith and the faith of my family than any of the Saints who are named in our church calendar.

Whenever I think of him, I always think of Saint Joseph, whom we affectionately call the "quiet man" of scripture. My grandfather was a man of few words, and when he did speak, it was important. Much like Saint Joseph, he was a hard worker, a man of great integrity, and a man of simple faith. Not "simple" in a pejorative sense, but "simple" in that it was uncomplicated. How beautiful it is for one to possess a simple trust in the Savior amid our unnecessarily complicated modern age! His life gave witness to the fact that the actions of one who possesses a lively faith speak much louder than mere words. It was by those deeds that he passed on the Faith to his children and grandchildren.

I learned much about work while helping him at his business, "Grandpa's Train Store," which also happened to be my first job. It was there I learned, among many other things, that a job well done was better than a job done quickly, but hastily. He always had clever one-liners to share, sometimes funny, often packed with wisdom. "Remember, you don't get paid by the job, you get paid by the hour," he would say (as would my dad, too).

I also learned the value of patience and compassion from his example. Countless times my grandfather would patiently sit and listen to the life story of some lonely person who would come into the store, someone who clearly had no intention of spending any

money. But despite that, Grandpa would not rush them out the door. Grandpa would lend the person his ear because he knew he was perhaps the only one they had to talk to, someone who would listen and keep them company.

My grandfather taught me the importance of gratitude as well. When you asked how he was doing he would say, “every day above ground’s a good day,” or, “the good Lord’s been good to me.” He was not being cynical in any way; the gift of his simple faith gave him unshakeable peace. My grandfather had absolutely no doubt about where he was going and Who it was who saved him.

I mentioned he was a man of few words, which made what he did have to say that much more impactful. After my ordination, he never missed an opportunity to encourage me in the work of ministry. But what stuck with me more than anything else was when he would tell me, “Nathan, I’m proud of you, and you’re making the Big Guy proud, too.” Now, I do not believe myself to be more worthy of praise than any other person, but what I can say is that the man I am today has a lot to do because of him.

Grandpa Stomberg conducted his life with the utmost humility and respect for others, a quiet yet imposing dignity which was felt so clearly at his funeral. After the funeral, one of the funeral directors told my aunt and uncle how impressed they were with how good the pall bearers looked. Every single one, without prior coordination between them, nor with prodding from family members, wore his cleanest and sharpest dark suit, and carried their grandfather with all humility and respect. Perhaps unsurprisingly, such decorum is apparently rare at funerals these days, and so the dignity and faithfulness of the Stomberg boys - quiet and unassuming though they were - spoke loudly and clearly to everyone who was watching. This encapsulates the impact of my grandfather’s lively faith in God.

Our faith must make us look different. And when we truly live by faith, we need not go out of our way to draw attention to ourselves, because our lives and conduct will be totally distinct from the lives of people around us.

My grandfather was a man of quiet faith, a man of simple faith, and a man of lively faith. And because he finished the race in faith, All

Saints' Day is his feast day - and the same is true for each of your loved ones who have died in the peace of Christ. What is more - one day, it too will be your feast day, if you continue to run the course by faith in Christ Jesus, for we are bound together in Him through offering our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

ALMIGHTY GOD, with whom still live the spirits of those who die in the Lord, and with whom the souls of the faithful are in joy and felicity: We give you heartfelt thanks for the good examples of all your servants, who, having finished their course in faith, now find rest and refreshment. May we, with all who have died in the true faith of your holy Name, have perfect fulfillment and bliss in your eternal and everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (An Anglican Common Prayer Book, p.357)

For All the Saints

For all the saints, who from their labors rest,
who thee by faith before the world confessed,
thy Name, O Jesus, be forever blessed.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

Thou wast their rock, their fortress and their might;
thou, Lord, their Captain in the well-fought fight;
thou, in the darkness drear, the one true Light.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

O may thy soldiers, faithful, true, and bold,
fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,
and win, with them, the victor's crown of gold.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine
yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

(William Walsham How
Hymn 287, The Hymnal 1982)

In Contemporary Context: The History, Beliefs, and Practice of Islam

The Rev. Mark R. Galloway (Bishop-retired), BA, ThM, MA, STM

Forward by The Reverend Nathan Stomberg: *The Cure for Our Warring Madness*

In the wake of the worst act of genocide against the Jewish people since the Holocaust, the resulting war between Israel and Hamas, and the shocking eruption of antisemitic, pro-Hamas demonstrations on college campuses across America and in cities across the Western world, I thought it timely to revisit the Bishop-retired's article below. This article was refreshed from a teaching on Islam previously given by The Reverend Mark Galloway, and it provides a comprehensive (yet concise) overview of the history and worldview of the Islamic faith, with a measured analysis through a Christian lens.

The dual poverties of moral relativism and moral equivalence have been laid bare by the Israel-Hamas conflict. That is, the violence of war and unrest in our streets have exposed an intractable worldview divide between those who honor the Judeo-Christian values which undergird Western civilization, and those who wish to see those values destroyed. Our progressive, post-Christian society has embraced moral relativism for generations, the logical end of which is now rearing its ugly head. When the Truth is exchanged for a lie, and when there is no absolute standard for good and evil, then guardrails no longer exist to prevent people from drawing an ugly moral equivalence between the perpetrators and victims of genocide. It is therefore increasingly important for Christians to be equipped to defend the Faith once delivered to the Saints, so we may guard our own hearts against these temptations, and more effectively speak the truth in love to our neighbors.

Our warring madness will never be fully cured until Christ comes again in glory. Until then, may we take the time to understand different worldviews so that we can with wisdom apply the salve of the Gospel in a manner most appropriate to the situations we face and the people we meet.

Introduction

Islam, along with Judaism and Christianity, is one of the world's three great unremittably, monotheistic faiths (monotheism being the belief in the absolute unity of the one sovereign God, who is Creator of heaven and earth). Islam, which has historical connections both to Judaism and Christianity, was founded on the Arab peninsula by Muhammad, or Mohammed (the "Praised One"), who, as "prophet," claimed to have received direct revelations from God over a period of twenty years. Muhammad's followers wrote down these revelations (which Muhammad had reportedly memorized) in the Qur'an, or Koran, which came to be revered as the Islamic Holy Scriptures. The name Islam is an Arabic word meaning "submission to the will of God (or Allah)." Those who practice Islam are called Muslims.

The rise of Islam in the seventh-century A.D., fueled by its assertive missionary zeal in the centuries that followed, saw its ascendancy both into the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and the Far East. In 2015 (the year of the most recent Pew study on the topic), Islam stands, after Christianity, as the second largest faith in the world, with nearly 1.8 billion adherents (24% of the world's population) and is the fastest growing religion in the world. Islam is, of course, the all-dominant faith in the Arab world, though Arabs constitute only about 20% of the world's Muslims. Approximately fifty countries in the world are Muslim-majority. Indonesia is the largest Muslim country, containing 13% of the world's Islamic population. Thirty-one percent of the world's Muslims live on the Indian Sub-continent and 15% live in Sub-Saharan Africa. There are approximately 4.45 million Muslims in the United States, of which only a fraction are of Arabic descent.

Muhammad

Muhammad was born of a noble and powerful family in Mecca (found in modern-day Saudi Arabia) in about 570 A.D. An orphan shortly after birth, Muhammad was raised by his wealthy grandfather and later by an uncle. In his youth he learned the customs and language of the Bedouins, a nomadic people, and accompanied caravans throughout the Middle East. He finally settled down in his mid-twenties, marrying a wealthy widow and becoming a successful merchant.

Although unable to read or write well, Muhammad acquired a reputation for wisdom. In about the year 610, at the age of forty, he claimed to have heard a voice which ordered him to restore the faith of Abraham, especially its emphasis on the one supreme God. Muhammad claimed that the voice was that of the angel Gabriel, and that the angel told him that he

(Muhammad) was to be the messenger of God. Muhammad's earliest revelations were supposedly scrolls that were read to him by this angelic being. In later revelations, Muhammad, while in a cave, wrapped himself in blankets which caused him to sweat, and which in turn allowed him to make utterances in a trance. For three years after his revelation the group that followed Muhammad's teaching was a secret sect. Thus, although he did not preach publicly until 616, by then his teachings had many disciples.

When he did begin to preach, because of the hell-fire he preached against their many pagan gods (their polytheistic beliefs), Muhammad soon made enemies of the rulers of Mecca. These same leaders of Mecca were also aware that in time Muhammad would make it his goal to assume political control of the city. After his first wife of twenty years died, and because of persecution and a plot to kill him, Muhammad exiled himself and fled from Mecca to Yathrid, later to be known as Medina ("The City"), where a colony of Jews had long before laid the groundwork for a belief in the one true God of Abraham. This escape of July 16, 622, called the Hegira, or the flight of Muhammad, marked the turning point in his life. Indeed, the Islamic calendar dates its history (and all subsequent human history) from this event.

In Medina, Muhammad became a dictator-king, and his speeches became those of a lawgiver. But his dominance was threatened from within and without. He suppressed, exiled, and killed any and all rebel opposition. After his failure to make a religious alliance with the Jews in Medina, he no longer directed his prayer toward Jerusalem but toward the pagan temple (the Kaaba or "Black Stone") at Mecca, as his followers continue to do to this day.

The source of Muhammad's great revenues came from his plundering the caravans of the pagan pilgrims en route to Mecca's temple. With three hundred men he defeated the military forces of Mecca at the Battle of Badr in 624. He made a truce with Mecca in 628 which allowed the polytheistic pilgrims to visit the city. At last, in 630, he captured Mecca and in one day destroyed all 360 idols of the Kaaba but decided to keep this ancient pagan holy site as a sacred sanctuary and symbol of the unity of Islam. Muhammad pardoned his defeated enemies, and, thus, his hold over the Arab world became complete. He continued to use Medina as the political capital of his territory but made Mecca the religious capital. On June 7, 632, Muhammad, the militant ruler and religious leader, died as he was preparing a "holy war" against Syria.

Teachings

Muhammad taught his followers that the world and mankind were created by God; that it is mankind's duty to obey God's will, which has been made known through the prophets, of which he was the last and the greatest. Muslims believe that Abraham, Moses, and Jesus all preached Islam, but that their teachings were corrupted by their followers into the religions of today. Only Muhammad's teachings, according to Muslim doctrine, have been preserved unchanged by God's will.

Islam's claim that Muhammad is the last and greatest of God's "prophets" is utterly incompatible with the teachings of the New Testament. In the First Epistle of John we read these clearly spoken words: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 John 1:1-3, 6b).

Muslims believe that, Jesus, though born of a virgin and being "a spirit from God and his Word," is, nevertheless, created and is not "eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one Being with the Father," as the Universal Christian Church emphatically teaches in the Nicene Creed of 325 A.D., and which orthodox Christians believe may be proved by the most certain warrant of the New Testament. Muslims thus reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus (his Incarnation) and compare the Trinity to a belief in polytheism.

Islam teaches that the crucifixion of Jesus was only apparent (that is, illusory), rather than real. For Christians, such a belief is an age old heresy known as Docetism, which was vigorously and effectively refuted in the first two centuries of the Christian era by the likes of Saint Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (d. c. 107), Saint Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (d. c. 155), and Quintus Septimius Tertullian (c. 160- c. 225), the first great systematic theologian of the Latin (Western) Church.

Christians, therefore, are called by our Lord to witness to Muslims about faith in Jesus Christ through our words and deeds, by showing them, as Saint Paul said, "a still more excellent way" of God's grace (1 Corinthians 12:31); the way of "faith, hope and charity" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

In almost absolute measure, Islam teaches that salvation is attained by keeping Muslim disciplines and religious law; that is, Islam is

overwhelmingly a works orientated faith (though the Koran is vague at best if not silent as to whether women can attain salvation at all). The Universal Christian Church, on the other hand, affirms that it is only through faith in Jesus Christ's atoning death on the cross that one is made righteous before God. In his letter to the Ephesians Saint Paul wrote, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Relationship to Judaism and Christianity

Muhammad was probably first influenced to become a religious seeker by the Judaism and Christianity which he, no doubt, encountered in pagan Arabia in his time. Before Muhammad, the religion of the Arab world was a kind of polytheistic fetishism, with many gods—sun, stars, and moon, as well as lesser gods, like mountains, trees, and stones. The Jewish and Christian faiths were well known but not adopted on the Arab peninsula. Thus, Muhammad and his later followers looked to the Judeo-Christian tradition for historical information. There are, therefore, many points in Islam which correspond closely to Judaism and Christianity, and they are very admirable. Muhammad drew more heavily, however, from the Hebrew Scriptures than he did the New Testament, and Islam is, therefore, to a certain extent, an outgrowth of Judaism. In spite of this, however, Muhammad created, in the end, a new religion, one based on the direct revelation he claimed to have received from God and which he and his followers codified in the Koran. Muslims believe that Islam completely and unconditionally supersedes Judaism and Christianity and that they are, therefore, no longer valid. Muslims believe that the faith of Muhammad is the one and true faith and that he is the final prophet. Islam is the last and greatest revelation of God to mankind.

One of the main differences between Judaism and Christianity, on the one hand, and Islam on the other hand, is the modern Western distinction made between the material and spiritual aspects of life. Westerners, for the most part, relegate each to a particular time and place. To the Muslim such a distinction does not and cannot exist. For Muslims, faith embraces all sectors and activities of existence. Historically, Islam is not just a religion, but a total way of life, a society in which the religious, political, economic, social, militaristic, and environmental aspects of existence are fused into one—a religious/social/political reality that has made it nearly impossible for Islamic nations to make a transition into being free and democratic societies. For instance, it would have been literally impossible for the United States of America (a constitutional democracy) to have been founded upon Islamic principles.

Islam also differs from Christianity in another important aspect. Islam is basically a lay religion with a practical orientation of life. Technically, Islam has no ministerial order as found in the Protestant traditions, or clerical hierarchy as found in the Anglican, Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions, nor does it have sacraments as found in Christianity. All these factors have combined to give Islam a special attractiveness to societies that are at a comparatively limited cultural level.

However, although there is no formally established clergy, there is in Islam a class of religious scholars (the ulama) and recognized leaders in a given community (the mullahs). The main task of the religious scholar is to comment on and interpret the legal tradition of Islam for the faithful—a process known as the Shariah.

Shariah is a complete system of rules regulating every aspect of Muslim life and was evolved from Muhammad's teachings and that of the Koran. All possible decisions or activities of the believer are listed as required, approved but not required, forbidden, disapproved but not forbidden, or simply permitted according to one's choice. Although never enforced in its literal entirety in any Islamic society, the Shariah has been the law of the land in most every Islamic state.

Muhammad originally permitted Jews and Christians to carry on their own religions in Muslim territory, provided they accepted Muslim public policy. Some of those in the Middle East who aided in the establishment of Islamic states still continued to be Christians. Later generations of Muslims, following Muhammad's earlier example, continued to extend tolerance to Jews and Christians. Although at times forced, conversion to Islam was in the Arab world, at least until the last one hundred years or so, generally prompted by the social advantages that were only to be granted to those individuals who professed the Muslim faith. Conversion from Islam to another faith, on the other hand, was, and continues to be, under Muslim (Shariah) law, punishable by death. Today there are native Christians who continue to live in the Middle East, though the number of Christians in that area (including Israel) is rapidly dwindling—especially in the ever growing modern and radically fundamentalist Islamic-states, including those outside of the Middle East, where persecution of Christians is often horrific. For instance, during the 1990's, in the Sudan in Africa, it is estimated that in that one country alone perhaps as many as three million Christians were murdered at the hands of the ruling fundamentalist Islamic regime.

Divisions within Islam

As Islam grew and the centuries passed, bitter disputes arose among competing sects and caused a split of Islam into two main branches. The Sunni (who today account for nearly 90% of Muslims in the world) have a doctrine founded on the Koran and the Sunna, the latter being the teachings of Muhammad and his immediate religious successors, and which is contained in the Hadith. The Sunni hold to an interpretive tradition which is regarded as closed. The Shiites (who today represent approximately 10% of the world's Muslims but tend to be the most militant) hold that a wealth of prophetic authority was transmitted to a series of biological descendants of Muhammad, called the imams, and that doctrinal authority can still be exercised and, therefore, the interpretive tradition of Islam is not necessarily closed and can be adjusted to new situations. Some sects of Shiites hold that the succession of imams is perpetual (genetic) and still operative today. It is the tension existing between these competing sects which largely contributes to the many violent conflicts and complex political realities across the Middle East.

Mysticism also plays a large part in all branches of Islam. Those who practice such mysticism are called Sufis, and their aim, by spiritual and bodily devotion, is to achieve direct apprehension of God or even total submerging of oneself in the Divine. Some of the Islamic suicide bombers that we read about in the headlines are Muslims who distort their own religious tradition when they, prior to their insane acts, claim to be legitimate Islamic Sufis.

Jihad and the Pillars of Wisdom

The Koran obligates all Muslims to the great five duties of Islam known as the "Five Pillars of Wisdom." The first pillar is that of the creed, the verbal profession of the oneness of God and the prophetic office of Muhammad: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger."

The second pillar is prayer. Each Muslim is required to pray five times each day: in the morning before sunrise, just after midday, late afternoon, at sunset, and at night. The prayers are recited in prescribed bowing, standing, prostrate, and sitting positions, while the believer faces in the direction of the Sacred Mosque (the Kaaba) in Mecca.

The third pillar is charity or almsgiving, a tithe (10%) of one's wealth to be given to the poor.

Fasting is the fourth pillar. It begins in Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. The fast is severe and involves complete abstinence from food and drink and from sexual intercourse from sunrise to sunset

everyday of Ramadan. The object of Muslim fasting and abstinence is not so much the mortification of the body as the atonement for evil deeds and a deeper communication with God. The fifth pillar is a pilgrimage to Mecca, performed at least once during the lifetime of every Muslim. An occasion for prayer, purification, sacrifice, and homage, the pilgrimage is made properly at one particular time during the Muslim year.

A significant minority of Islamic sects have raised the obligation of waging “holy war,” jihad, to (if you will) “the dignity of a sixth Pillar of Wisdom.” Jihad (which means “to strive or struggle”) is considered by those who adhere to its principles as a striving for good against evil. Although it has obvious militaristic and historic connotations, fighting is, at least in theory, allowed only for the protection of the weak or oppressed, in self-defense, or for the redress of wrongs. Wars of selfishness or personal gain or ambition are, again, at least in theory, not to be considered jihad.

Islam in Contemporary Context

In its contemporary context, Islam’s largest struggle is to reconcile Islamic thought with the sophisticated, highly technical, multi-cultural, pluralistic, and democratic principles of Western civilization, which is increasingly influencing virtually every area in the Muslim world. Sharp divisions exist between those who still strive for a universal fundamentalist Islamic society and those Muslims who are trying to fit their faith into the principles of an industrial and free-capitalistic Western society, which has as its origin of law and order and cultural heritage the Judeo-Christian values, such as is traditionally exemplified in Great Britain and in the United States of America.

Some Concluding Comments about Islam and Muslims

1. The overwhelming majority of Muslims in this nation, just like the overwhelming majority of Christians and Jews, and men and women of many other faiths, are good and faithful citizens of this free land—obeying the law and living with joy and freedom within the context and rights granted under the dictates of the Constitution of the United States of America.
2. There is absolutely no justification for a Christian to ever persecute or participate in any violence or hate against a person of Arabic descent or any person (regardless of ethnicity) holding to the Muslim faith. For a Christian to promote an atmosphere that spews hatred toward any person because of their ethnic origin or religious preference is not only un-American, but also a grievous sin against the God who has redeemed us from our sins by grace through faith in his Son Jesus Christ’s atoning death on the cross.

3. Not all Arabs are Muslims, and not all Muslims are Arabs; in fact, fewer than 10% of Muslims living in the United States are of Arabic descent, the other 90% are Caucasian-Americans, Latino-Americans, or African-Americans, who have either by conversion become Muslims or were born into a family already confessing the Islamic faith, or they are immigrants who adhere to Islam and who originate from the various parts of the non-Arab Muslim world. By the way, most Muslims do not wear turbans on their heads; Sikhs (who are also people of a devout monotheistic faith) often wear turbans, not Muslims.

4. The essence of the piety of the vast majority of the 1.8 billion Muslims around the world is that of men and women who dedicate their lives in humble and sincere submission to God, and who do not believe in, nor condone murder or terrorist activities. But I must also in good conscience say there is a rational and well-founded anxiety which the predictable sermons of tolerance offered by a liberal and politically-correct media and by a large group of progressive, post-Christian liberal Protestant clergy in our nation have completely missed. The “tolerance” which the United States of America (and other Western nations) is able to extend to diverse cultural, religious, and racial groups, is granted on condition that the members of such groups respect the civil peace and order of this nation. Where that assurance is missing the foundations of true tolerance is undermined. For instance, Muslim Shariah law can never be (and should never be expected by a Muslim living in America to be) legally implemented in the United States. Indeed, the totalitarian socio-political doctrine of Shariah is a very real danger to American (and Western) security. If left unchecked, the insidious ideology that is Shariah will seek to do no less than replace American jurisprudence with a compulsory system of “immutable” Muslim law – whether by subversion or force.

5. Given the pattern of terrorist attacks by Muslims acting in the name of Islam, including Muslims who are citizens of the United States and other Western countries, it is not an irrational anxiety (it seems to me) for non-Muslim Americans to ask what it is about the teachings of Islam that makes some of its adherents (though granted a relatively small minority) susceptible to terrorist ideology. Bland assurances from political pundits and unbiblical liberal Protestants that Islam is inherently peace-loving—like highly spiritualized interpretations of jihad—do not intellectually go very far when there is plenty of evidence to prove that significant numbers of Muslims—including American Muslims—take a very different view. If moderate Muslims wish to reconcile America to Islam, they would do better to concentrate their efforts on never giving legitimization to any terrorist violence that has been or ever is done in the name of Islam.

What Do You See?

Deacon Doug Stomberg

As the season of Pentecost came to a close, “Faith, Hope, and Charity” had been the theme at Holy Communion Anglican Church. In Saint Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians, he writes of “the way of love,” which is a favorite at many Christian weddings. However, at the end of Chapter 13, Paul writes about looking in a “mirror dimly”:

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known (1 Corinthians 13:8-12).

What Paul is implying is that we cannot fully know the perfect, fully know God’s glory and His truth, until we understand we are finite, and God is infinite. This understanding will come when we see Him “face to face.” This refers to Jesus’s second coming - when we are called home. The Old Testament uses the phrase “face to face” to refer to seeing God personally (See Genesis 32:30, Deuteronomy 5:4).

In 60 A.D., about the time Paul wrote this letter, glass was an item for the wealthy, and a glass mirror would only be obtained by royalty. A mirror for anyone else of this period would most likely have been polished brass or bronze, thus giving a “dim” image. Paul could have used a variety of analogies such as murky water, fog, or a moonlit night, but he chose the mirror to explain the clarity of knowing God’s full love. The mirror, whether it be ancient or modern, works best to make the point.

You may have seen stories or news articles about siblings or childhood friends who meet at the same place every year for a group photo. It is fascinating to see their progression in age and their physical transformation over the years. We view the progression of our own lives in much the same way as looking at a series of photographs or looking at ourselves in the mirror. At some early point in our lives, we started to visit the mirror every day. As toddlers, we stood on a stepper to wash our hands and brush our teeth. As teenagers, we would comb our hair and preen ourselves for school, and as adults, we shave or apply makeup for work. And we watch ourselves age, we see “crow’s-feet,” lines, and gray.

What do you see? With clarity, we eventually see we are broken and finite. As infants, the reflection we see is innocence, as teenagers we see our vanity, and as adults, we see aging bodies longing for strength and wisdom. There is pride, selfishness, and stubbornness.

Consider Saint James' analogy in Chapter 1 of his epistle:

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (James 1:19-25)

Brothers and sisters, when we look “intently” at our “natural face,” truly, what should we see? We should see a creation of God. Someone made in His image.

Paul tells us we will know fully who we are, and we will know God fully when we see Him “face to face.” The full knowledge of God will not happen here on Earth. Paul also makes this clear in his prayer for spiritual strength in his letter to the Ephesians.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to **know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge**, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:14-19)

We will eventually see the Lord in His glory. In John 17:24, Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, He prays that we may be with Him to see His glory: “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” Although we do not fully know God,

He has revealed plenty to us in His Son, Scriptures, and Creation. We must rejoice in what we know. Let it be known to others what has been revealed. We must praise and magnify the Lord.

I will praise the name of God with a song;
I will magnify him with thanksgiving. (Psalm 69:30)

In a sermon at the August 2011, “Oxygen 11 Conference” in Sydney, Australia, Pastor John Piper made a reference to magnifying God. I will paraphrase: God must be magnified through a telescope, not a microscope. A microscope is used to view small objects, to make the small appear large. We must use a telescope, so to see how large the “large” truly is.

In our Anglican liturgy, the Presiding Elder proclaims, “Therefore, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels, and all the company of heaven, we proclaim and *magnify* your great and glorious Name, evermore praising you and saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and Earth are full of your glory: Glory be to Thee, O Lord Most High. Amen.”

So then, let us look in the mirror. What do you see? Are we looking at God with a microscope or a telescope? Let the Lord open the eyes to our hearts!

Open the eyes of my heart Lord
Open the eyes of my heart
I want to see you
I want to see you.

To see you high and lifted up
Shinin' in the light of Your glory
Pour out your power and love
As we sing holy, holy, holy.
(Lyrics by Michael W. Smith)

As we pray in the English Common Prayer tradition: “Almighty and Everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of Faith, Hope, and Charity; and, that we may obtain what you promise, make us love what you command; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*”

May the Lord Jesus Christ open the eyes of our hearts so that we may see Him “face to face”.

This Advent, Follow Jesus without Delay

The Rev. Nathan Stomberg, *Rector*

The Church always celebrates the Feast of Saint Andrew on November 30th. As with most of the Apostles, we do not know much about Saint Andrew from the Gospels. We know he was the brother of Saint Peter, and that he was a fisherman. John's Gospel tells us that Andrew was first a disciple of John the Baptist.

Historians estimate that Saint Andrew was martyred by the Roman Empire around the years 60-70 A.D., near modern day Greece and Turkey. Andrew was crucified, and according to legend, he requested to be crucified on a diagonal cross (as opposed to the traditional Latin cross upon which Jesus was crucified) because he did not count himself worthy to die in the same manner which Christ died. From this legend, the icon of Saint Andrew's cross - the X-shape, known as a "saltire" - became a very popular symbol in heraldry, and is used in numerous flags around the world today - most recognizable in the flag of Scotland.

We also know that Church Tradition celebrates Saint Andrew as the first to heed the call of Jesus Christ, who eagerly went forth to prepare the way of the Lord. In fact, Eastern traditions commonly refer to Andrew as "the First-Called." Saint Andrew readily awaited the arrival of Jesus, and when he met Jesus, he quickly brought others to meet him.

According to John's Gospel, "One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which means Christ)" (John 1:40-41). Saint John Chrysostom said this about Andrew in the Gospel of John [emphasis added]:

After Andrew had stayed with Jesus and had learned much from him, he did not keep this treasure to himself, but hastened to share it with his brother. Notice what Andrew said to him: **We have found the Messiah**, that is to say, the Christ. Notice how his words reveal what he has learned in so short a time ... They reveal the zeal and concern of men preoccupied with this question from the very beginning. Andrew's words **reveal a soul waiting with the utmost longing for the coming of the Messiah.**

Andrew's words reveal a soul waiting with the utmost longing for the coming of the Messiah, looking forward to his appearing from heaven, **rejoicing when he does appear, and hastening to announce so great an event to others.**

As we journey through another Advent season, it is worth pondering three things we learn from the Gospel accounts of Saint Andrew.

First, we should readily await the return of Jesus Christ our savior. Andrew, as a disciple of John the Baptist, was alert and ready for Jesus' first arrival. He prepared his heart for the moment in which Jesus called him. This is one reason why Andrew did not hesitate when Jesus asked him to follow - he was neither shocked nor surprised.

Second, we should eagerly desire to be present with Jesus, not only at his Second Coming, but also in the here and now, by his Grace in the Holy Eucharist. Andrew was eager to follow Jesus, because he desired to be with Jesus more than anyone else.

Third, our love for Christ should move us to share His love with others, first and foremost with our own family members. Andrew's love for Jesus overflowed from inside him; it became a passion that he had to share with others. And who did he tell first, but his brother Simon Peter?

Consider Saint Paul's words in his letter to the Romans: "For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'" (Romans 10:13-15).

Why then do we hesitate to share the Gospel plainly when the opportunity arrives? Why do we hesitate to invite family to church when we have the chance? If "faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17), what better place than church to hear the word of Christ preached?

It is easy for us to convince ourselves that family members get a "free pass" into heaven, or even that we will be saved by virtue of our parents' and grandparents' faith (or charitable giving to the Church).

But, as the saying goes, God does not have grandchildren – only sons and daughters adopted through faith in Jesus Christ.

Recently I caught up on the phone with a Catholic friend from college. We ran track and cross country together, but as time has passed it has been satisfying to witness how our conversations have moved more and more from college reminiscence to matters of faith. And I am continually inspired and moved by the personal piety brought forth by his love for Christ.

This friend of mine revealed that he had been fasting and praying for someone's conversion. Imagine that - he so desired someone to come to faith that he chose to fast, to focus his prayers as he made that petition to the Lord! And yet, how often do we have difficulty praying for other people, period? Prayer is the water which helps us grow fruit in keeping with repentance. And fasting - described in our catechism as “a means of self-denial, repentance, intercession and identification with the needy, and a way of listening to what God has to tell his People” (An Anglican Common Prayer Book, p.658) - is the fertilizer which helps our fruit multiply.

Recall Saint Andrew's words to his brother: “We have found the Messiah.” What a glorious reality! His response demonstrates the heart of the Gospel - “Look what I have found! And I want you to share in it!”

We need Advent to remind us of these responsibilities as we wait for Christ to return. And for that reason, Andrew is a perfect saint for the Advent season. May we, like Saint Andrew, follow Jesus without delay, and invite those near us to share in His abundant grace.

The Collect for Saint Andrew the Apostle

Almighty God, who gave such grace to your apostle Andrew that he readily obeyed the call of your Son Jesus Christ, and brought his brother with him: Give us, who are called by your holy Word, grace to follow him without delay, and to bring those near to us into his gracious presence; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Prayers for the Seasons

Almighty God, . . .

*Give us grace to cast away the works of darkness,
and put on the armor of light,
now in the time of this mortal life in which
your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility;
that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty
to judge both the living and the dead,
we may rise to the life immortal;*

*. . . you have given your only-begotten Son
to take our nature upon him, and to be born of a pure virgin:
Grant that we, who have been born again
and made your children by adoption and grace,
may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;*

*. . . you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word:
Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts,
may shine forth in our lives;*

*. . . by the leading of a star you manifested your only Son
to the peoples of the earth:
Lead us, who know you now by Faith, to your presence,
where we may see your glory face to face;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.*

(from Collects for Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany:
An Anglican Common Prayer Book, pp. 121-123)

*“For unto you is born this day
in the city of David
a Savior,
who is
Christ the Lord.
And this will be a sign for you:
you will find a baby
wrapped in swaddling cloths
and lying in a manger.”*

(Luke 2:11-12)



HOLY COMMUNION ANGLICAN CHURCH

meeting at the

Rocky Hill Grange
1340 S. County Trail
East Greenwich, RI

The Reverend Nathan Stomberg, Rector

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Sunday Worship

Holy Communion	5:00 p.m.
Fellowship	6:30 p.m.

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*“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man
and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”*
(John 6:53)