

ALWAYS AND EVERYWHERE

It is right and a good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks.

Work while elephants fight



BY BISHOP PAUL V. MARSHALL

What I did this summer was attend a three-week international conference of bishops and then come home to sit with my father while he died.

Neither of these events is close to being sorted through in my mind. Each will reverberate for a long time. In setting and tone, the two events were quite different. What they had in common was my having to be patient with a process I could barely influence, let alone control.

All one could do in either case was be present and receive whatever graces were available.

During the conference in England, my counterpart in Sudan and I had to deal with a disagreement in a way that highlighted the kind of quiet receptivity I mention here.

"When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers," say the Africans with a universal wisdom. My partner, the Bishop of Kajo Keji, and I came to a moment when strong positions taken by a leader of one of our national churches on a hot-

button issue had the potential of polarizing our dioceses and our personal relationship.

What the "elephants" were struggling about is not trivial, but it is high up the pyramid of issues, not basic, as is our present work. We are helping to rebuild the infrastructure of Southern Sudan and strengthen church life there while energizing Americans in the areas of mission and evangelism, essential stuff.

The concerns and anxiety of others had put us in a position where an issue not relevant to our work together had the potential to divide us. So after some preliminary conversation one chilly evening as we watched the English sunset, we trusted each other enough to talk it all out.

What I was grateful for in that conversation was that neither of us tried to convert the other. Each of us has enough education and experience to think through positions, and we come from and serve cultures that have marked differences in what is discussable and how it is discussed.

We worked to find a container, so to speak, large enough to embrace and energize us for our work in the grass while the elephants continue their struggle.

We said the usual things about first things first and keeping the focus on the work, but they weren't a sufficient container.

The container became for me a meditation on the New Testament story of the Good



September 7th, 2008

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from Jesus Christ our Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We write to you having returned to our respective dioceses after the 2008 Lambeth Conference in the United Kingdom. God graciously bestowed the gathered bishops with many gifts of worship, fellowship, shared stories of faith, and the deepening of vital relationships. Surely every bishop present at the conference left with a deepened appreciation of the desire that members of our Anglican Communion have to follow Jesus in ministry and mission, and to do so together. We give God thanks for all these blessings.

We also rejoiced that Bishop Anthony was invited to be a leader of one of the "Indaba" groups of forty, where the small Bible study groups came together to explore issues in depth. Although this required a great deal of his time, we were grateful for his opportunity to lead.

The conference expressed its solidarity with persecuted people everywhere, and particular reference was made to the genocide in Darfur and other acts of oppression and violence in Sudan. Together we pray for just and lasting peace throughout the whole of Sudan.

During the Lambeth Conference, Sudan's Archbishop Daniel released a statement, and followed it with a press conference, and both of these attracted media attention. He emphasized the traditional position he takes on a number of issues, particularly human sexuality, and no one could fail to note the precision with which he spoke his mind. We are also grateful for the charity with which he spoke.


Bishop Paul had the opportunity to meet privately with Archbishop Daniel and with several Sudanese bishops. Their time was truly affectionate and their discussion very open. Archbishop Daniel made it clear that although theological differences exist within the communion, and that our cultures are different in some respects, he is extremely grateful for the New Hope project, and that he very much supports the on-going partnership between the dioceses of Kajo-Keji and Bethlehem. He was most affirming of the bishop and people of Bethlehem.


We wish to assure you that as your bishops we are of one mind about the importance of our work together for the spiritual health of both our dioceses. This is a time of change in Anglicanism, a truth that is apparent on many levels, and no one can predict what the Anglican Communion will be like at the time of the next Lambeth Conference. We can and do trust God to work his will, and therein is our peace of mind. We pledge to work together and in each of our dioceses to build understanding and love as all of us seek to follow the Lord Jesus in word and deed. All of our work is begun, continued, and ended in Him.

One of the gifts that the existence of differences in culture and outlook presents all of us is the experience of being loved by people who are not like us and who may not share all of our views on any number of subjects. The grace of learning to receive love from those who are not like us is a gift from God that awakens us to the depth of God's own love in giving Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world.

As we continue our vital work together, it is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will guide us into deeper levels of understanding, devotion, and dedication of the ministry our Lord has given to us in Kajo-Keji and Bethlehem.

Faithfully yours,


Bishop Anthony Poggo


Bishop Paul V. Marshall

Samaritan, a story originally told to help people deal with the unattractiveness of a crucified savior. In that story, a man who has been robbed, beaten, and left for dead looks up to see aid coming from a Samaritan, of all people. That figure was a stranger, an outcast mongrel, a person whom he would not normally even acknowledge. In accepting help from a person with whom there was no community and little understanding, the man lying on the road was saved in every way that one can be saved.

For my partner bishop and me, this affirmation was paramount: the affection and support that passes between our dioceses is made more valuable

by the fact that it flows from and is received by people who may not, truth be told, understand or approve of each other in every way.

I do not embroider here upon "beggars can't be choosers." There is no begging involved in our relationship; we work in a mutually beneficial partnership, each partner receiving very different gifts.

I do say that a basic spiritual experience found us to be like the man lying in the road: surprised and gladdened to be loved by someone we would not have chosen for the job.

Is this the week for you to ask who are the unsought sources of grace in your life?

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