

THE ROAD HOME FROM BABYLON

A view from the Gallery at General Convention 2003

“When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong. But passing through the midst of them, he went away” (Luke 4:28-30).

When Jesus was confronted with the disbelief of those who knew him best, in his own synagogue at Nazareth, when they refused to listen to the truth, he spoke to them a harder truth: that God does not always act according to their plans. Jesus was not stupid. When they tried to suppress the truth, by throwing him headlong down a hill, he stood his ground: he walked right through the midst of them, and he left his home.

Left his home?

Since Minneapolis II, and the final gasps of the 74th General Convention, much work has already begun on how to re-form the Anglican Church in this country, and on this continent. Like any Reformation, there is much work ahead. Nothing clear will happen over night. It will take months, perhaps years, to navigate our way through all the land mines and road hazards of ecclesiastical divorce.

Like any separation, it is a time of sadness, and pain. When I heard the news from Minneapolis, I wept. Many voices are now crying out that it would be terribly wrong for traditional Episcopalians to “leave” their church, leave their home, to just “walk out.”

But what’s wrong with walking out? If you were at a wedding reception and the groom

became drunk and started having intimacies with his bride on the dance floor, wouldn’t you “walk out”? I should hope so. I should hope you wouldn’t stay to watch the “festivities.”

Well, very similar “festivities” are now going on around certain altars in certain dioceses around the Episcopal Church. And this is not new. I heard a piece on National Public Radio several years ago about an Episcopal church in (ironically) downtown Minneapolis that hosted monthly “Gay Balls” in the undercroft where the homosexual community would gather, dressed up in bizarre costumes, drink excessively, dance wildly, and hold what amounted to a mini-orgy there in the church basement. The rector was the host.

As I remember that story, I can’t help recalling St. John the Divine’s vision of decadent Rome: “The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; and on her forehead was written a name of mystery: ‘Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth’s abominations’” (Revelation 17). Sitting in the gallery of the House of Bishops on the morning of August 6, the “morning after” the Robinson vote, I saw much the same vision: a dark, oppressive cloud of gloom hung about the place, an air of spectacle turned to tragedy, of purple and scarlet turned to black.

But I think the truth is this. What the 74th General Convention did regarding Gene Robinson and the “blessing” of homosexual marriages was not to create something new, but simply to become honest enough to admit what has been going on clandestinely in a number of dioceses for years.

Why be surprised?

Yes, I’ll admit, after watching so many heterosexual priests (and a bishop) get defrocked over the years because of their sexual sins, it is a bit shocking that a man who openly left his wife for intimacies with another man should still be a “priest in good standing” in one of our dioceses. And yes, it was more shocking that the clergy and laity of that diocese would, despite his perverse behavior, elect him to be their next bishop. And yes, it was even more shocking that the majority of General Convention should consent to such nonsense.

But why be surprised?

Those promoting sexual “liberation” in the Episcopal Church cast off from the moorings of Holy Scripture years ago and have gone far beyond the point where they can feel embarrassment about anything. Shame is a word they dropped from their vocabulary decades ago.

So why not walk out?

Why stick around to have to watch what’s going to happen next on the dance floor? Still, some protest, if we who are traditional, conservative clergy and laity break ties with ECUSA, we will be “causing schism.” **No we’re not.** The schism has already occurred. This particular schism was conducted by vote: two votes in the House of Deputies, and two in the House of Bishops. It is those who have now successfully revised the doctrine, teaching and practice of the Episcopal Church/USA on the matters of sexuality and marriage who created this schism. They knew before they voted what would happen when they did as they did. They can not claim ignorance, here. They were clearly and

frequently warned for months by our orthodox bishops (not to mention the Anglican Primates) what would follow such votes. Those who voted to have schism apparently didn't care. Perhaps some of them voted as they did in order to, yes, sad to say, to hasten our Exodus. We have been, let's face it, a consistent thorn in their ecclesiastical sides.

So now that the schism has been forced upon us, I say we should take a deep breath of fresh air, and begin our journey home from Babylon: home to sacred doctrine and home to a branch of the Vine that honors Holy Scripture rather than ridicules it, that honors Jesus Christ as The Way, not one paltry way among many. We can make our way back to our heavenly Jerusalem, and begin to rebuild the walls of the City of God, and begin to wash some of the stains out of the bridal gown of the Bride of Christ.

God, through Jeremiah, warned the children of Israel of old, "Flee out of Babylon; let each one save his life, perish not for her guilt. This is a time of vengeance for the LORD, he pays her her due" (Jeremiah 51). God gave the order to leave, you see, because he had also made a promise: "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile" (Jeremiah 29).

We have been set free from captivity in Babylon. And yes, like Our Lord, we may be forced to move on from our home in Nazareth. But better to leave home, than leave the Body of Christ.

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