

[send this](#)[bookmark](#)[print](#)[close](#)

The Parish Paper

OF
ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

Vol.34 No.38

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity

08/17/03

Sermon for Trinity VIII

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits."

Thursday evening I had a call from Fr. Frederich Meisel. Fr. Meisel is the retired Rector of the Parish of Ascension and St. Agnes in Washington D.C., a priest for fifty-six years, and Rector of that Parish for twenty-five years. Fr. Meisel is now ninety years old, suffers from a heart ailment, and is confined to his apartment.

You may remember that Fr. Ralston was invited to preach at Ascension and St. Agnes, which holds to the '28 Prayer Book, some years ago. When it came time for him to preach, Fr. Meisel, then in his middle eighties, took William by the hand and led him to the pulpit.

Well, Fr. Meisel remains a gentle and sweet Christian priest. He called me to lament the present state of the Episcopal Church and to encourage us all to continue in the life of faith and witness that is St. John's. He told me, as he said this, that he could see both the national cathedral and our nation's capital from his apartment. Which I thought was very symbolic. It is as if this elder Priest represents the wisdom that is needed in both the secular and sacred institutions of our day. Weak in body, but with faith strong as steel and his heart pure gold, he measures the church and the state by virtue of his noble mind. In his humility, he asked for our prayers. I in turn asked for his. When we hung up, I thanked our precious Lord for the fellow-ship of Fr. Meisel, and for the Communion of Saints.

The matter that concerns us this morning is the matter of communion. Communion is participation, participation in the life of God, made known in his Son Jesus Christ, and given to us in the presence and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Communion is therefore a living reality. It is not an abstraction or an institution. Communion is certainly not a resolution of the House of Bishops. When human history is rolled up like a garment, and the nations of the earth yield at last to the Kingdom of God, our life will not consist in the stratagem of uncertain dominions, whether of the church or of the state. Ours will be the eternal life of illumination and love. Communion, participation in the Spirit of the living God, begins now with the knowledge of his Word

and is made perfect in the love of his Will.

Until that time when we come into the glory of our Savior, this world holds many dangers, toils and snares. In our lesson from St. Matthew, Jesus warns us about false prophets. He does not speculate that they may come. He tells us that they will come, and to beware of them. False prophets appear to be just ordinary sheep, part of the flock, roaming the pasture, seeking the consolation of nature, but actually they are not so. They are inwardly, says Jesus, like ravening wolves.

Wolves are sneaky creatures. They creep about secretly and make their approach stealthily without a sound, and then when they can, they pounce to rend apart their victims. This is what a false prophet is inwardly. He appears to be like the faithful Christian, part of the communion, but his mind and will are far from true faith. His intention is to consume the sheep, not to commune with them. He does not want to feed with them; he wants to feed on them. The false prophet wants only to consume with the false notions of his ideology, with what appears to be true ideas, but are really only means to ravenous power, the appetites of the imagination and of the flesh, of pride and lust. Jesus told us to beware of false prophets. He knew they would come. But, he said, we would know them by their fruits. The truth or the lie would be evident in their words and in their deeds.

This past week the ideology of a political interest group captured the mind of the institution we call the Episcopal Church. And within that institution the faithful are now exposed to danger. That is why we said the Litany this morning, to repent before God for the sake of our institution, and for our own sins. Ideologues have captured our institution, but that is all they have done. What we must be clear about from the very beginning is that they did not capture the essence of the church. The Lord Jesus told us that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Bride of Christ.

My friends, you may have been left this past week by the majority vote of a political convention, but the Episcopal Church did not leave you. While the doctrine and discipline of our institution have become false and vain, the Episcopal Church in its essence remains right here, and in all those parishes which continue as we do. The vagaries of mind and the machinations of the General Convention are the mere shadows of the spirit of the age. And so, above all we must be clear about this. You are the repository of the Episcopal Faith. The true inheritance of the Episcopal Church is with you, not the General Convention.

The fact that we must now face is that this has happened. It is no longer potential, it is actual. The two houses of General Convention, the Clergy and Laity of the House of Deputies, and the House of Bishops, have confirmed, by majority vote, the election of a Bishop who divorced his wife and left his children. He now lives in a sexually active homosexual partnership. In addition, while these two houses, that of Clergy and Laity, and that of Bishops, did not at present approve specific rites for the blessing of same-sex unions, they did acknowledge in a resolution that such liturgies are being performed within dioceses of the Episcopal Church, and they did nothing to oppose or stop them.

Their political maneuver is transparent. It is too risky, politically

speaking, for them to establish specific rites now. The whole of the Anglican Communion is reeling over the confirmation of the Bishop-elect from New Hampshire. All the ideologues needed to do was to acknowledge that in fact such liturgies are being performed, and do nothing. They want the status-quo to continue. Their resolution directed the "resources" for same-sex unions to be compiled by the office of the Presiding Bishop during what they call a time of discernment. The truth is that these resources, these liturgies that they acknowledge already exist and that they will do nothing to inhibit, will become a file for the Presiding Bishop's future reference.

The General Convention, in moral principle, has approved of the blessing of active homosexual relationships. That is what has happened, both with the confirmation of the Bishop-elect and with the passive recognition of same-sex liturgies throughout the Episcopal Church.

The action of the General Convention has profound spiritual consequences, and again it is of the utmost importance that we realize that we are not talking about the implications of a proposed action. It has happened, and consequences, destructive of the life of communion, now exist.

Simply put, with this action, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church has embraced both heresy and schism. St. Augustine provided the church centuries ago with the definitive understanding of heresy and schism. The classical definition of heresy is a sin against the truth that is known and received in the church. The classical definition of schism is a sin against love which is the unity of the church. Heresy and schism, sins against truth and love, are sins which destroy communion. This is why faithful Anglicans around the world are in such great mourning for the Episcopal Church. Let us take these up, heresy and schism, one at a time.

...to be continued

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

send this

bookmark

print

close

[Report Errors](#) | [Comments](#)

Copyright 2003 - 2004 St. John's Episcopal Church in Savannah, GA. All rights reserved.