

Bishop's Address – 225th Convention
St. Peter's Church, Lewes
March 13, 2010

“That We All May Be One”

I want to begin my Convention address on a personal note. As many of you know, this year began for me with the unexpected death of my youngest brother. It was a difficult time for our family and especially for my parents to lose their youngest child. In the midst of this real sadness my appreciation and sense of pure gratitude for the Spirit and ministry of our Church has deepened and grown. The clergy and lay leaders of the Episcopal Church in Virginia, where we grew up, were wonderful sharing with us the pastoral ministry of Christ, through their time and attention, in the things they did and said. From all around Delaware I received notes, cards, letters, expressions of love and concern. I read them again while I was preparing for this address. In my experience this is the real thing, so near to the heartbeat of a loving Christ. “Love one another,” Jesus said, “as I have loved you. By this all will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”

Jesus spoke these words gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room. He was with them to break the bread and bless the cup for the sacred Passover Meal. What a moment it must have been as John the Evangelist describes it for us. These are the same disciples who left everything to follow him. And, oh the things they saw. They were there when the man born blind receives his sight. They were there when a young boy's lunch of fish and bread scraps fed a teeming crowd of 5,000. They were the ones who saw the dead man, Lazarus, stand up still reeking with the aroma of death.

All these things they saw and even more. Standing before the gates of Jerusalem branches of palm broken off and waving in the air, “Hosanna to the coming One! The Son of David! Blessed, blessed is the one who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest!” All this they saw and so much more.

So on that holy Passover night he said the blessing, broke the bread, and shared the cup. And after he finished the prayers, Jesus was so evidently troubled in spirit. He said to them “Very truly I tell you, one of you will betray me. In a very little while I will be with you no longer. And, where I am going you cannot follow.” They were uncomprehending. They were afraid. But, he said, do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not be afraid. During these coming days of the Cross and of the Tomb I am giving you this gift. I am making you this Promise. A new commandment I give you, a new commandment I leave with you – love one another. So this prayer, this promise is lived out in his hope that we may all be one.

This new commandment – to love one another - couldn't have come at a better time. There were old commandments. But, they weren't working then. And, they aren't working now. Old commandments, you say? We didn't know that there are old

commandments. But, there are. They may not be written on stone tablets, these old commandments. But we hear them every day. What are they?

Commandment #1 *Be Afraid!*

“Be afraid has been the insistent drumbeat pouring from every media outlet. The only real news, we are told, is bad news. Don’t pay attention to all that other stuff. It’s only an illusion. The only real news is bad news. This is the first commandment: “Be afraid!”

Commandment #2 *It will never end*

Over this last year we have continued to hope for the return of peace on earth. But, the wise and the powerful tell us that we will yet have to wait and pray for those still in harm’s way. It is time for war to end. This is the second commandment: “It will never end.”

Commandment #3 *It can’t be fixed*

We all know. It is painfully obvious that even basic medical care is beyond the reach of too many. Still, the wise and the powerful want us to think that the system can’t be fixed even though we know that with hard work, mutual self-sacrifice, and a desire to build up a common good – it can be. This is the third commandment: “It can’t be fixed.”

Commandment #4 *Think about Number 1*

In such an uncertain economy the loudest voices of common sense urge us not to be generous, compassion, or just. This is a dog-eat-dog, survival-of-the-fittest world we are told. Generosity, compassion, and justice serve only the weak and the foolish. This is the fourth commandment: “Think about Number 1.”

But, we have a new commandment. Jesus has given us a new commandment to love another and look for the signs of his presence fulfilled in the day-to-day ministries of the faithful – disciples and friends living and serving together in faith, hope, and love. These are blessings. They are real and they are many.

The presence of Bishop Martin Shaw and his wife, Elspeth, are a visible reminder of our unity with others around the world. What a blessing this companion relationship has been over these nine years. How much we have learned from the steadfast witness of your faith. How much your friendship has meant to us especially in a time when some have wanted to break longstanding Anglican bonds. We will always be grateful for your gracious hospitality and gentle good spirit. This friendship has deepened our understanding of what it means to say that we are one. Thank you.

Our presence here at St. Peter’s Church, Lewes is a reminder of our own heritage of faith, and of the vitality, and opportunity of this present moment. Missionaries from Britain

came in small sailing ships across a broad ocean to found this church. Through the years as the Town of Lewes has evolved from a small fishing village into a vital, diverse, and thriving seaside community, St. Peter's Church has grown along with it. I continue to be impressed by the ways that not only St. Peter's but so many other Episcopal churches in Delaware have risen to the challenge and taken advantage of the opportunities to serve and to share in Christ's Name. I recognize and support the clergy, vestries, and lay leaders who are wrestling with and responding to, in faithful and thoughtful ways, the challenges of church life today. I know that this is hard work and appreciate all that you are doing.

As we leave this church this morning, look around. This old church surrounded by the tombs of our ancestors. Their tall stone markers rise like prayers to the heavens. As Paul the Apostle reminded us, we are the fulfillment of their hopes as we build and shape our churches responding to the opportunities that our ever changing communities present. We are one with their faith through the ages.

Over this last year we were pleased to welcome to the Diocese of Delaware our Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori. Her presence was an important reminder of how the Episcopal Church has grown in leadership over these last years. The most recent General Convention was a reflection of her thoughtful, faithful ministry. As our lay and clergy deputies will tell you, the good spirit was evident and obvious. Although not receiving much attention in the headlines, this General Convention adopted a denominational health insurance program for the Episcopal Church – a reminder to all of us that through hard work, careful planning, and good will, even important changes can happen. This General Convention also completed a revision of the canonical rules governing the conduct of church leaders – an important facet of our commitment to make this Church a good place and a safe place for everyone to worship, work, and serve.

Few places in this diocese showcase our unity more than the dining hall at Camp Arrowhead. There is nothing quite like joining the campers, counselors, and camp staff for dinner on a warm summer evening. What a beautiful place and valuable resource for our ministry. The vitality and hope for the future are obvious. Last summer over 800 young people attended Camp Arrowhead. Many were able to do this because of the gifts you make every year for camp scholarships and because of direct financial support Camp Arrowhead receives from our Diocesan Budget. Your generosity helps make this possible. And, don't forget – send a kid to Camp Arrowhead this summer.

This year also saw our youth ministry begin to take shape through the work of our new Diocesan Youth Council and our youth coordinator, Terri Valente. They have been leading our prayers at this convention and will be reporting to you later this morning. They invited me this past summer to the first annual Bishop's Bash. What's a Bishop's Bash you ask? Sixty young people gathered at St. Thomas's, Newark for a party, a costume contest, and a chance to ask the Bishop any question they wanted. For example "What songs do you have on your iPod?" "What's the favorite perk of your job?" Ask me later.

St. Stephen's Church in Harrington on the first Saturday in December was another place to find the unity in our diocese. Was a church ever more filled with people than the day the we ordained the first class of deacons to serve in our Diocese? Thank you to St. Stephen's for their hospitality that day. We introduced them to you last night. We are proud of all they have done to prepare for this ministry and of the community of people who have supported them in their training – including Rita Nelson, the program coordinator. These new deacons remind us of our own need – each one of us - as Christ's disciples to pray and to serve in Jesus' Name.

This has also been a year when we have all been united by our concern about finances. Although Jesus said, "life is more than money," there have been times when this has been hard to remember. Today our Diocesan Treasurer will present to the convention a balanced budget. So many things have gone into making this possible. Fundamentally, it is a reflection of our long-term commitment that the Diocese of Delaware is and will be a source of stability and strength for the mission of the church through the years. It conveys a sense of cautious confidence as we face the future together.

And, let me say to wardens, treasurers, vestries, thank you for your generous support. It is recognized and appreciated. And, to staff, trustees, and members of the Finance Committee thank you for your hard work in shaping budgets and reducing expenses.

I also want you to know how impressed I have been by the outpouring of love, support and prayer for the people of Haiti and the Episcopal Church in Haiti following the recent earthquake. The work that Episcopal Relief and Development is doing there has been extraordinary. I am very pleased that during the first week of November Robert Radtke, president of ERD will be visiting Delaware. We will look forward to learning more about specific ways that we can help with the rebuilding in Haiti and the support the work of Episcopal Relief around the world.

Now our unity is not just about the present and the future. It is also about the past. I am grateful to all who have participated in showings of the documentary film "Traces of the Trade" and have had subsequent discussions and parish studies. Remember the commitment that we made for this to happen in every congregation in our Diocese. There is much for each of us to learn about the weight of the historic tragedy of slavery that still drags us down.

The date is set for our Diocesan Service of Repentance and Apology for our involvement in the institution of slavery. Saturday, October 30, 11 a.m. at the Cathedral Church of St. John. Why then? This is important. We want to do this well. And, we have learned from the experience of others that doing it well takes time. I hope and expect that you will be present – clergy and lay leaders from every congregation. This is the only way it can be a truly diocesan service. I also intend to invite elected public officials from across the state. This is an issue for all of us as members of this community and not just for the Episcopal Church.

All these things bring to mind the opening words of Psalm 34 “I will bless the Lord at all times; God’s praise shall ever be in my mouth.” This is the high calling that unfolds before us – to see whole lives, real lives, our lives in the perspective of God’s life. This is the on-going insight of prayer that we should see, that we could see every moment of life as being held in the palm of God’s hand and so to never lose heart no matter what may come. So I have loved you, Jesus said, so you must love one another.

This, my friends, is the day that the Lord has made. Bright is the light that shines upon our path. This is field that the Sower has planted. Already the field is ripe for the harvest.

Tempered and challenged though we may have been - God has given us one, more, good year. Let us use it well. Amen.