

ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Various

“Be All You Can Be – in Christ!” (part 1)

ONE ON ONE WITH THE GENERAL

Twenty-two years ago, during the summer of 1994, I was a seminarian attending Seminary in Alexandria, VA – preparing to get my M. Div so I could be ordained. And one of the requirements for the degree was what was called Clinical Pastoral Education or CPE, for short. What is CPE? Basically it is a fancy term for being put in one-on-one ministry situations with those who are physically or psychologically sick and then to come back and evaluate the session with peers and your supervisor – usually chaplains with the facility you were at. The settings for the program were generally hospitals. There were a number of hospitals that offered the program in the DC area, and I chose the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, MD. NIH is a research hospital so the patients there are those who are undergoing experimental treatments that aren’t offered elsewhere – and there is usually no cost involved. While at NIH, one of my first visits was with a man suffering from leukemia. I soon found out he was no ordinary fellow but he was a retired US Army general. His name was Maxwell Thurman. We got to know each other, and he told me of his service in Vietnam as an artillery officer; we talked a bit about his Christian faith and we prayed. I had the opportunity to visit with him on several occasions, and on the last occasion, a younger woman (I believe it was his niece) and her daughter were with him and we said the Lord’s Prayer together before he was headed into some more extensive treatment – possibly a bone marrow transplant – I can’t remember.

But of all the things that we talked about, the one thing that he said he was proudest of was the slogan, “*Be All You Can Be.*” He asked me, do you know that slogan? I said yes; He then said, he was the man behind that slogan. Do you remember it? It was the main recruiting message of the US Army from 1980-2001, and its most successful. In December of 1999, *Advertising Age*, the principal trade publication of the advertising industry, issued a retrospective look at advertising focusing on “the top one hundred campaigns of the 20th Century.” Number 18 was “*Be All You Can Be.*”

It certainly was a classic. In preparing for this sermon, I had to do some research because I had forgotten the general’s name and I wanted to make sure I had the right facts and this is what I found – not only was General Thurman the man behind the slogan – he is considered one of the key figures of transforming the US Army into a professional all-volunteer force. His posting as chief of U.S. Army Recruiting Command in 1979 is considered instrumental in remaking the Army's tarnished, post-Vietnam image and attracting new generations of highly motivated recruits.

On top of that he was not just an average general – he was a four star general, Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, and former commander of United States Army Training and Doctrine Command. He delayed his retirement when President Bush handpicked him to oversee Operation Just Cause, when the US kicked General Noriega out of Panama in 1989. He served two tours in Vietnam – first in the Intelligence Corps from 1961-63, and then as an artillery battalion commander in 1967-68. While still commander of

US South Command, he was diagnosed with leukemia and then retired in 1991. He fought the disease until his death at age 64 in 1995 and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.

But here’s the thing – the man had all these accomplishments and could have shared all about them with me – but the only thing he really emphasized was that phrase – **“Be all you can be.”** And you know what? At the end of the day that is exactly what God calls us to be about. The Word tells us not to compare ourselves to others, don’t worry about what others are doing or not doing ; don’t be quick to point the finger; but look at yourself and - *be all you can be* – not all you can do, no – *be all you can be in Christ*. That’s the key. Be all you can be in Christ.

I want you to turn in your Bibles to **Ephesians 4:11-16** **“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”** Jesus gave leadership gifts to certain men of God in order to equip the saints – i.e. the people of God – for the work of service/ministry, in order to build up the body of Christ so that we are united in faith and knowledge (not just head knowledge but intimacy with the Lord!) to a mature man (spiritual maturity) and to the standard which is the fullness of Christ. In other words, God desire is that we be all that we can be in Christ Jesus!

THE KEY, THE ENGINE, AND THE FUEL

Let me just say, no one (and I mean no one!) can be all they can be apart from the One who made them. Therefore, **we must be born again;** we must know Christ if we will ever fulfill our potential in this life. That is the starting point. If you get a new car, the only way you will be able to realize the full potential of the car is if you have the key, fuel and an engine that sparks. All the rest is for show and comfort. But for the car to work – the key, the fuel and the engine that sparks is needed. The key to being all you can be is faith in Jesus Christ – and that means being born again. That’s the key. The engine that sparks is the Holy Spirit – He is the power source. But we have to also have the fuel; and the fuel for being all we can be in Christ is multifaceted. There are four main components. We will look at the first one today.

Now before I go any further – what is the difference between being and doing? To be someone means that you are already doing the things that reflect who you are. “Being” starts with the heart and then flows into action. “Doing,” on the other hand, is just that – it’s doing all the stuff you should do but it is all for show – to either gets someone else’s approval or to show off – to show how good you are. That is the problem with religion – it always falls into one of two traps – we are doing all these things to gain a god’s approval – we try to measure up – or we do it to look good and be in the “in” group - so we can say, “I am such and such” or “I am better than you.” So the do’s are a means to show one’s superiority or to justify looking down on someone. This is what Jesus confronted with the religious leaders of his day. It is why He called them whitewashed tombs.

When we just are – then our actions flow from within. That is what integrity is; that is what authenticity is. It is the opposite of hypocrisy. Now don’t misunderstand! Sometimes our hearts won’t be

in the mood to forgive or to love or do what we should do, but we do it anyway. Right? But the reason we do it is not for show or to simply gain God's approval; we do it because we know it is the right thing to do and to do otherwise would be to go against God.

Now if we are to be more like Christ, if we are to be all we can be in Christ, it means spending time with Him. Remember Martha and Mary? Mary spent time with Jesus at His feet because the more we spend time with Jesus the more we will become like Him and do the things that we should be doing. And so the fuel comes from an ongoing relationship with Christ. And if you are being all you can be in Christ you will be doing all the things you need to be doing. Not all the things you can or must do but all the things you need to do.

YOU ARE NEEDED FOR THE LORD'S ARMY

Do you remember what came after the slogan to music, "*Be All That* (the word "*that*" was added in the song) *You Can Be*"? There were different endings but one was "*because we need you in the army.*" Well, the army needs all of you – not the US Army, but the army of the Lord - the Body of Christ. God's Word says so twice – first in Romans 12 and in I Cor. 12 - where it likens us to members of the human body where each member has a role to play and something to give. Everyone is expected to contribute. Why? Because you are needed.

What is the need? Take a look around. Are we any better off spiritually or morally or even materially in this country than 10 years ago, than 20 years ago, than 50 years ago? I would say we aren't. We are in a post-Christian age. First, the culture broke down and then families broke down; and now many churches are broken down.

But 10 years ago, St. Bart's said no we are not going to be broken down, we are going to be faithful to God's Word and we moved here. And God's people stepped up and enabled us to accomplish much. The community took notice but now that we have settled in, we have to turn it up a notch. Why? Take a look around – do you see what is happening right now in our world, in our nation, even here in Tonawanda? Do I have to say more? Take a look around.

And in taking a look around we need to take a look within. We are a church that is 61 years old and most churches have a hard time keeping momentum when they reach the third generation. I don't know if you know that or not. But the typical trend is that in the first generation there is excitement and growth, and in the second generation things become more stabilized and plateau; and then by the third generation decline. We are about at the third generation now. But we don't have to follow the typical trends.

Two years ago, Fr. Molison, Deacon Reitz and I realized something had to be done. We needed to refocus, we needed to reenergize, we needed to be all that we can be as a Church of Jesus Christ. We asked some lay members – John Hillestad, Carl Calabrese, Linda Soltis, and MJ Brzeczowski - to join us and our group became the Core Team. We had our church look at our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. We looked at our demographics internally and externally and we recast the vision and mission of our church to make it even more specific and gospel-centered than what we already had. What's next? Two things – 1) develop strategy teams for all four areas of our mission; and 2) to begin with a pilot event that will serve as a Christ-centered outreach. More will be unveiled concerning these in the weeks to come.

But I want to get back to what it means to be all that we can be in Christ as individuals and as a church. What is the fuel? Did you know that our mission statement gives us the fuel? That’s right. Let’s look at it again. Christ-centered worship, prayer, Bible Study and outreach. I want to close by again talking about what I talked about last week – prayer.

If we are going to accomplish anything for the Lord, it must be immersed in prayer. After seeing Jesus in action, the one thing the disciples asked Jesus was that He teach them to pray. After His transfiguration, when the Lord came down from the mountain and found his disciples were unable to cast out demons from a possessed boy, He said, ***“this can only come about through prayer.”*** (Mk. 9:29) Before Jesus made any tough decisions, He prayed. He prayed alone, He prayed with the disciples, He prayed on the mountaintop and in the garden of Gethsemane. He prayed in the morning and at night time. He was a man of prayer. For two reasons – it is how He communicated with His Father and He did it to as an example for us.

What did we hear in our second lesson from **1 Timothy 2:1-2**: Paul wrote, ***“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity”*** Listen to what Paul wrote in **Colossians 4:2**: ***“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;”*** and then in **1 Thessalonians 5:17** – ***“pray without ceasing”*** Prayer is so fundamental to our walk with God that it should be no surprise that it is mentioned directly or described in every New Testament book except for 2 Peter! It is why in the Anglican Tradition we have what is called the Daily Office – a series of prayer services that can be used individually or corporately for morning, noonday, evening, and compline – before bedtime.

It is why we have a prayer room on the second floor. It is why we have an intercessory prayer group. It is why we have prayer available after service at the altar. It is why we have had joint prayer services for specific needs and occasions – persecuted church; those affected by drugs; for our nation; for prodigals; for healing. In fact, there will be a combined healing service on Thursday September 29, at New Covenant Tabernacle. When we first moved in here we had people signing up for prayer 24/7 for a number of events and purposes.

It is time that we do that again if we are to reach our community. It is time we do that if we are to be doing God’s will in our lives. My challenge for everyone here is threefold: 1) How is your prayer life? What is the focus of your prayer life? Is it on the future direction of this church? 2) Keep an open mind and a willing heart for what you can do as a part of St. Bart’s for reaching our community for Christ and 3) Be willing to get involved when there are opportunities when we gather for prayer services and prayer times – tomorrow night is one such example as we continue to pray for our nation and community and the election. Oh, and don’t forget about the prayer room when we do a 24/7 prayer time! Prayer is essential if we are to be all that we can be in Christ. May we be people and individuals of prayer! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!