

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward, Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Various

"Let Us Arise and Build!" (one year later) part 2

LET US ARISE AND BUILD NEXT YEAR

Last week we spoke of how God has done great things in our midst through the *Let Us Arise and Build!* Three Year Mission Initiative. Much has been accomplished. What are the plans for this coming year? In terms of the building, next year we would like to remodel the kitchen and the restrooms and pay down some of the mortgage. But more important is what we do as a Body not as a building.

The Church is the Body of Christ and as such we are a living organism, not an institution. And as a living organism, we are to be growing both individually and corporately. We are members of the ACNA - *the Anglican Church in North America* - and the beauty now is that we are part of a greater Church that is truly Bible-believing and Christ-centered. In addition, in this new Anglican Province, there is a strong commitment to the work of the Holy Spirit, prayer, and healing. I believe it will be such a commitment that will insure our growth and impact on Western New York for Christ.

CLERGY CONFERENCE IN NORTH CAROLINA

This past week, your clergy had the opportunity to gather at a retreat center known as Ridgecrest just outside of Asheville, North Carolina. We had the chance to not only get together with other Anglican clergy across the country and even Canada but we heard from Judith McNutt and Archbishop Gregory Venables.

Judith McNutt and her husband Francis McNutt head an international healing ministry and center in Jacksonville, Florida. Francis was a Dominican monk before marrying Judith in 1980. They have 100 years of ministry experience between the two of them. And she basically talked about the power and importance of healing as part of any church ministry. She also a Christian psychotherapist and she shared some personally stories and testified to miraculous healings like seeing a leg grow eight inches after people prayed for the person! Before arriving at our retreat, she lead a healing conference for 600 Roman Catholic clergy and seminarians in Chicago. She said God is working across denominational lines to bring healing and restoration in Christ's name and through the Holy Spirit.

This, she said, is vital, for if the Church does not wake up and do what it was commanded to do, our society will never be changed. What is the reality of our society today? She said, they have seen an increase in mental illness, addiction with drugs making a huge comeback, and a 300% increase in suicide the last 10 years. She mentioned that they are seeing more hauntings in cities and the need for deliverance ministry (being set free from demonic oppression and possession). She also said that Wicca is the fastest

growing religion in America (1990 - 8,000 to 134,000 in 2001!) and Satanism is the fastest growing religion in Europe. It is one of the reasons why Pope Benedict has issued a call for an official exorcist to be resident in every Roman Catholic Diocese.

She said that if we want to grow in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we need to practice the gifts. The more you practice the more God will give you. And she also said that healing is a mystery. We don't always know why God heals when He does and why some are not fully healed in this life. But the reality is that as Christians, we have been giving the authority to heal through the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been given the power to heal through the Holy Spirit, but what we lack is the passion! Do we have a passion for souls? Do we have a passion to be God's instruments of His grace and healing power?

We also heard from Archbishop Gregory Venables. This bishop is originally from England and after being a missionary priest to Paraguay, he became bishop of and then Archbishop of the Province of the Southern Cone which comprises the nations of Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia, and Peru. He is the one who provided apostolic oversight for our priests and the entire ACNA. A great debt is owed to him.

He told us now is the time to move on. There are really two Anglican Communions, today. It is just a matter of time when it all will be sorted out. Why? He summed it up this way: You can't mix holiness and unholiness. Grossness and perversion is becoming the norm in many parts of the Anglican Communion. We cannot tolerate such distortions of the Gospel.

He added that at the end of his life as he stands before the Living God, he doesn't want to have to look back and say, "Boy, I could have done more!" How stupid could I have been?"

He told us that the Church has three simple priorities and they all begin with the letter "M": - Mission, Mission, and Mission!

But the highpoint of his teaching was when we looked at the miracle of the feeding of the 5000 found in all four gospels, and the raising to life again of Lazarus in **John 11**. Do you know what Jesus said to Philip and the other disciples after he realized there were so many people who were hungry? He said, "*You give them something to eat.*"

And then when Jesus came to Lazarus' tomb in **John 11:44**, after He cried, "*Lazarus, come out!*" Do you remember what Jesus then said to those standing around? "*Unbind him, and let him go.*"

GET UP AND GO!

"*You give them something to eat,*" and "*Unbind him and let him go.*" Do you see the connection? We are the Body of Christ and as the Body we are called to be Christ's hands and feet. God provides us

with the truth and the power, now we have to go out and use it. You see the Christian life is not a passive life. It is one that demands action. The problem is there are too many *pew potatoes* in the church. Jesus gives us life that we might get off our duffs and go and do His work of healing and restoration. In short, to love others as He loves us.

For example, this past Friday, I was at the *Saving Grace Ministries* celebration of their new corporate headquarters and worship center. Many here are familiar with this ministry begun by Pastor Terry King - Jim Wheaton's son-in-law. We have supported this ministry for the last ten years. Most recently, they raised private funds to turn an old Buffalo Firehouse into their main offices. Recall that they now have nine houses that host men who have been released from prison on parole. And they have a rate of 70-80% of integrating then men back into the community. New York State run facilities can only garner a 11-15% rate. *Saving Grace* has been so effective that they are now receiving grants from the state to do more! Representatives from the New York Division of Parole and the Mayor of the city of Buffalo, Byron Brown, were on hand for the dedication ceremony.

But such a ministry of the above could have been done without people stepping out in faith and putting Christ's love into practice. God comes in to work and bring life but we need to help unbind the broken and set those in bondage free. We need to give people something to eat that will never make them hungry again.

FIVE AREAS OF GROWTH

How are we going to do that here? I want to list five ways.

1) Newcomer ministry – do you see someone you don't know? Say hello to them and get to know them. There are a number of folks that help welcome visitors to our church. It is vitally important that we provide a warm and friendly atmosphere

2) G.O.D Committee – formed earlier this year, the God, Outreach, and Development Committee has interviewed other pastors from successful local churches to see what their congregations do to bring people to church and to Christ. The most effective element was members reaching out to others in their community and inviting them to church.

3) Compass - this is a group of our members that is meeting monthly to pray and strategize how can we minister to our neighbors and engage in mission outreach locally and abroad. The first event planned will be on All Hallowed's Eve. That afternoon we will have people pray for our neighbors near the church and then leave a note on the door stating that they were prayed for and inviting them to visit St. Bartholomew's.

4) Emphasis on prayer and healing – think of the Church’s prayer room. Have you used it yet? How about are prayer intercessors during holy communion. They are available to pray with you. And starting today, after services a priest will stay back in the sanctuary to lay hands on people and anoint them with oil for healing.

5) Home Cell Groups – we will be looking to train members to facilitate home Bible Studies for fellow members. This is an effective way to build community, biblical knowledge and experience fellowship and the Spirit of God.

The Christian faith is more than a spectator endeavor. It is more than just being in church on Sundays. It is a 24/7 experience of following Jesus as Lord and bearing witness to His grace, love and power. It is really what “*Let Us Arise and Build!*” is all about. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!