

The Rev. Canon Barry L. Beisner
Trinity Cathedral
Advent 3, December 11, 2005

I am happy to be here, again. I am grateful for your welcome. I am always pleased to find my name in the clergy list in your bulletin—it feels as if I'm coming home, even though I'm practically never here—as I make the rounds of the diocese Sunday by Sunday. I am proud of my association with this Cathedral.

I am very much aware that this has been a challenging year for you. I have stayed personally close to your search process, kept you in my thoughts and prayers, and even tried to be of some use to your search committee and vestry in my role as diocesan deployment officer. (The diocesan deployment office, in case you're wondering, is located in the Office of the Bishop; to find it, go across the alley—Trinity Lane—past the dumpster and turn right.)

The exciting reality is that the announcement of a decision about the choice of a new Dean is coming very, very soon. (How appropriate to Advent!)

You've done great work. Thanks be to God. And thank-you. As a priest of this diocese, I am proud of my cathedral, and of its role in our diocese, and I am excited to think of what Trinity's future holds for us all.

I've studied your Profile, and am impressed that from congregational input resulting in a list of findings 33 pages long, the Profile succeeds in so succinctly describing what you are looking for:

Someone spiritually grounded

Visionary

Inspirational

Family-oriented

A talented preacher who challenges our intellect

A compassionate counselor open to all

With strong leadership skills

A proven ability to delegate

An inclusive management style

Experienced at leading a large organization in transition in many directions

With good business sense

Financially savvy

Who will validate and confirm diversity and tolerance

Community oriented

Sensitive to relationship with city and surrounding culture and the world

Balanced between involvement in life of cathedral and larger church

With a sense of humor

Who connects with people

Likes kids

Is comfortable dealing with different generational needs

Nurtures a permission-giving church

Willing to try new and different strategies

Comfortable raising funds above and beyond the usual, and creatively effective in doing so

Who has lots of energy

Eager to face lots of challenges and several complex issues, seeing them as positive opportunities

[Heals the sick, raises the dead, walks on water...]

I have one friendly, admiring admonition for you. As one of my seminary teachers used to say, “In choosing its leaders, the Church would do well to remember that the Messiah has already come.”

You might indeed find the man or woman capable of meeting all your expectations. If you do, I assure you that your Diocesan Deployment Officer will be urgently looking for a way to make several clones.

But I hope instead that you will soften expectations with the recollection that the Messiah has already come, and begin now to prepare to receive your new Dean in that gracious, generous spirit that knows the right place to hang its messianic hopes.

Today’s liturgy reminds us where that is.

Notice the simple and profound way in which the collect of the day begs the essential question: Stir up your power O Lord and with great might come among us—and do what, exactly? The collect itself doesn’t answer, but leaves it hanging. Instead, it goes on to talk about the help we need with our sins, with all that gets in the way of our participation in God’s plan and purpose.

But just suppose God—the Lord of the universe, a force greater than which cannot be imagined--were to answer this prayer, stir up his incredible power and with great might come among us—what is it we would like this God to do when he shows up?

(It is with that in mind that Annie Dillard suggests our ushers should hand us more than mere bulletins as we enter the church; they should hand out crash helmets.

So God stirs up his power and with great might comes among us—what then?

Remember John the Baptist’s reply to the questioners from Jerusalem? “Among you stands one whom you do not know.” Among us with great power to do what?

The reading from Isaiah reminds us. Elsewhere in the Gospels, we see Jesus stand before a crowd of religious people who are asking the question, Who are you, really?—much the same question put to John—and Jesus answers by opening his Bible to exactly this place and reading: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me, he has **sent** me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners...to proclaim the Lord’s favor....”

Who are you? they want to know of Jesus. He answers, I am the one **sent** by God to do this work, God’s work. God is stirring up his power and with great might now comes among you and I am here to carry out his mission

Who are you? they want to know of John the Baptist. He answers I am the one **sent** by God to bear witness to the one who with great might comes among us to do God’s work, God’s mission.

Who are you? they will later want to know of the apostles. They’ll say we’re the ones whom Jesus empowered and to whom he said, As the father **sent** me, so I **send** you.

Who are you? people of Trinity Cathedral. Who are we? The world wants to know, though the wondering may often come shrouded in indifference. Perhaps the actual question is more like, What have you got that we want?

Our answer is that we too are **sent**. (Remember that the word “apostolic” means “sent.” We are most truly that apostolic church we profess to be in the Creed, not when we clutch anxiously at doctrine or dogma, but when we focus outward in mission.)

Sent by God who has empowered us like the apostles in his great might. **Sent** in that power to bear witness like John.

Sent by Jesus as he was sent—to do his work, to carry out God’s mission.

It is God’s mission. We are made by God for God’s purpose, and our lives will be absurd until we embrace and live that reality. When we do, we experience the incredible privilege of participating with God in God’s mission, and the profound joy of using our God-given gifts for God’s purposes.

God gives the power to live it. God gives the power to do the work. God wants the world made new, and he has decided to use a church to get it done. That’s us. Sent by God.

What have we got that the world might want?

We have a gospel.

I recently saw an ad for a bunch of retailers that said “Discover the power of passionate shopping.” We say discover the power of compassionate giving. We have a gospel of

freedom from the oppression of consumerism. We have a gospel of service to others that will free you from your toxic self-absorption

In a culture of death--where more than 1 in 5 Americans are at this very moment in their lives giving thought to the possibility of suicide--we have a gospel of hope, and of meaningful life.

In a culture of violence, we have a gospel of peace.

In a culture of racism, sexism, ageism, and classism, a culture that depersonalizes and dehumanizes, we have a gospel of respect for the dignity of every human being.

Amidst exploitation and economic injustice, we have a Gospel that asks after the poor, and demands to know: "How the children are doing?" [cf. J. Wallis]

We have a gospel of healing amidst addiction.

We have a gospel of confidence amidst relentless, anxious change.

We have a gospel of reconciliation amidst all manner of fear and hatred.

We have a gospel of acceptance, a gospel of forgiveness, a gospel of life-changing love.

We have a gospel that is light shining in the darkness,

We have a gospel, and we have the power of God to do the work of that gospel.

About a year and a half ago, I was blessed to be at Sunday morning worship in an Anglican church in South Africa. It was in Sharpeville, a place where during the days of apartheid blood had been shed in witness to God's mission.

None of the service was in English, until the Invitation to Communion. Then, the priest raised the blessed bread and wine and said—not, "The gifts of God for the people of God"—but said rather, "Who knows whether might be his last? Don't you want the power of God to do God's work this day? Come to the Table."

I am certain he looked at me as he said it. But it wasn't meant to frighten, and it was in no way morbid. It was really just another reminder that we have a mission, we have a gospel, and we have the power of God to live it, do it, make it known.

Soon you will have a new Dean.

A Dean is a fine thing to have and I am confident that God is sending you someone truly splendid. But you don't need a Dean to do the work God **sends** you to do. You don't need a dean in order to enjoy the astounding privilege of participating with God in God's

mission. You don't need a Dean in order to share the gospel given to you with a world that is dying to hear it. You don't need a Dean and you don't need a Canon to the Ordinary, either. You only really need to be willing to take the risk and pray the prayer: "Stir up your power O Lord and with great might come among us—that we might share your gospel, and do your work." You only need to come to the Table asking for the power to do God's work this day. Friends, come to the Table.