

The Most Rev. Fred J. Hiltz  
Opening Eucharist  
63<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Synod of the Diocese of Kootenay  
April 20-22, 2018

*"Though we are many, we all belong to each other." (Romans 12:5)*

What a wonderful theme for Synod.

This coming together of friends in Christ, from one range of mountains to another, one valley to the next, one orchard to another, one vineyard to another, and one community to another.

This coming together of clergy and lay delegates from every parish.

This coming together with our bishop to worship and to take counsel together, trusting in the leading of the Holy Spirit - bringing to our remembrance the things we know and revealing to us things not yet known, coming to us fresh from the future into which God is calling us even now.

*"Though we are many, we all belong to each other."*

Even as we gather in Diocesan Synod, we know ourselves as belonging to the yet ever widening circles of the Church – the Ecclesiastical Province, the Church National, the worldwide Anglican Communion, the Church Catholic for which the Lord of the Church's abiding prayer is this, - "that they all may be one". (John 17:11)

In every circle of the Church's life, from the most local expression of its witness to the Gospel to the vastly global, the role of leadership according to Rowan Williams is to speak and conduct oneself in such a manner that the people of God can see "The Gathering Christ" - the Christ who says "Come, you beloved of my Father", "Come follow me", "Come learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light", "Come, apart and rest awhile", "Come abide in my love. Then go in my peace. Go and bear fruit, fruit that shall last."

The people of God should be able to see in their leaders – ordained and lay, "The Gathering Christ".

Your bishop, John, the 285<sup>th</sup> in succession in the *Anglican Episcopate in Canada*, the 9<sup>th</sup> of the See of Kootenay, and the 11<sup>th</sup> Metropolitan of British Columbia and Yukon, has been one of those kind of leaders.

It has not escaped many of us, that the Readings for tonight's Opening Service of Synod are those appointed for Anslem, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093-1109. Among the many treasures in his extensive scholarly writings is "A Bishop's Prayer". It reads in part

“Jesus, good shepherd, they are not mine but yours,  
for I am not mine but yours.  
I am yours, Lord, and they are yours,  
because by your wisdom you have created both them and me,  
and by your death you have redeemed us.  
So we are yours, good Lord, we are yours,  
whom you have made with such wisdom and bought so dearly.  
Then if you commend them to me, Lord,  
you do not therefore desert me...or them.  
You commend them to me.  
I commend myself and them to you.  
Yours is the flock, Lord, and yours is the shepherd.  
Be shepherd of both...your flock and your shepherd.

John has been just that kind of a bishop, using the authority entrusted to him to nurture the flock, to build up the Church, and to renew its ministries.

When the Church has gathered to take counsel we have always appreciated John’s spirited centeredness, his grounding of our work in prayer, his attention to due process, his wisdom and his patience. We have all recognized and are deeply grateful too, for his quest for excellence in equipping the saints for the work of ministry.

It is no surprise that for the last Synod he chairs, John has invited one of our Church’s leading teachers in the subject of Congregational Vitality, The Rev. Dr. Jay Koyle, who works fulltime in The Diocese of Algoma and serves as Chair of Faith, Worship, and Ministry for The General Synod.

In ever so many ways, too many to name in this short space of time, John himself has embodied the very theme of this session of Synod, “Though we are many, we all belong to each other.” We are one in the Lord.

It is of course, from Saint Paul’s volumes of writing that we draw this theme. Paul’s most celebrated image of the Church is “The Body of Christ”. He is its head and we its members, members one of another. While Paul speaks of this image in an extensive manner in his First Letter to the Corinthians, he references it in his Letters to the Romans, the Colossians and the Ephesians as well.

Chapter 4 in Ephesians is renowned for Paul’s eloquence in declaring there to be one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and in all, and through all. There is one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling in Christ.

Urging unity among the believers, he calls them to be forbearing in love, and ever eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In the spirit of Paul’s teaching, Anglicans have often spoken of “the bonds of affection” with which we endeavour to hold one another throughout our Communion. These bonds of affection are the very stuff by

which our Cycles of Prayer take shape. They are the essence of Province-to-Province relationships and Companion Diocese relationships. They are the very substance by which the Networks of the Communion are membered for Communion-wide attention to matters of family life and health care, the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples, relief and development, justice and peace, and the care of creation. They are the principles that draw people together across a range of theological perspectives on any number of issues before the Church. They are the very heart of dialogue across difference.

In all honesty, the Church must confess that its greatest struggles through time have been about “inclusion”. The struggle for some to know and feel they belong and the struggle of others to acknowledge this struggle and to address it.

Think about

- the inclusion of the widows and orphans in the Acts of the Apostles,;
- the inclusion of women in leadership roles – their place in the Councils of the Church – their place in priestly ministry and episcopal ministry;
- the inclusion of children at the Lord’s table;
- the inclusion of young people in the Councils of the Church;
- the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples not as guests of Synods, but members;
- the inclusion of people who describe themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and two-spirited.

In the Church’s long deliberations over such matters of inclusion, “the bonds of affection” rooted in Paul’s exhortations to the early Church have certainly been strained, and sadly in some moments, broken.

In my own journey through much of the tension in the Church over matters of human sexuality, I continue to take heart in the words of one of my predecessors in office, the much loved Howard Clarke, who said, “I find myself going back time and again, to the radical inclusiveness of Christ. Was ever there so great an adventure as this than to follow him and to be made like unto him?”

I think too, of the highly respected Michael Peers who in addressing the General Synod in 1998 said, “I strive to move the Church to...champion all her minorities of age, gender, ethnicity and sexuality, and to work toward the day when the whole Church can make joyfully all the difficult and necessary affirmations that spring from the incarnate love of God”.

And I think too, of an Episcopalian Bishop who at the Conference in which we were wrestling with the tensions in the Communion said, “You know, in the midst of it all, I take great heart in that wonderful ‘nevertheless’ moment at my eucharist. He paused as if to invite the question, “What moment?” and then said with a very broad smile said, “You know, that moment when we all say ‘We believe’”.

- “We believe in one God” in the mystery of the Holy Trinity – that Communion of Persons within the Godhead itself.

- We believe in the mystery of God in Christ – humbled for a season and exalted for eternity.
- We believe in the mystery of our reconciliation in Christ. With Paul, we can say, “We have peace with God through our life. Through him we have obtained access to the grace in which we stand and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”
- We believe in the holy mystery of our union with Christ in Baptism - buried with Him, we rise with Him to newness of life. We believe in the holy mystery we celebrate this night – the Eucharist, the Great Thanksgiving, the feast of love divine. In this banquet to which all are welcomed and in which all are fed, we have a foretaste of that banquet in time in which all God’s children will be gathered in accord with the grace and justice of the divine will. Our work is setting that table so as an old communion hymn puts it; it will be “furnished well with joyful guests”.

In this sacrament we are made deeply aware of that unity St. Paul speaks about. Indeed, when the consecrated elements are held up before the assembly, we respond with but one heart and voice saying, “We being many are one body for we all partake of the one bread”.

It has been said that every celebration of the Eucharist is a “remembering of ourselves as the Body of Christ”,

- a re-gathering,
- a re-uniting,
- a refreshing of our identity and calling, and
- a refreshing for our life and labours in his name.

When St. Augustine distributed the sacrament elements he said, “Become what you are”, “Become the Body of Christ”, “Know yourselves to be members”, and “one of another in him”. I like that ancient image of “becoming”. It reminds us that we are always being called to yet greater maturity in Christ, to yet deeper devotion to Him and yet greater dedication to live the Gospel he speaks to us and to the world.

“Though we are many, we all belong to each other”.

Reflecting on the unity to which we are called in Christ, Rowan Williams, in addressing bishops from around the world gathered in retreat before the Lambeth Conference 2008, made a very helpful distinction about the nature of this unity. He said, “We’re not just talking about a quantitative unity of people gathered for the sake of being together, but about a quality of unity in which each person is diminished by the pain of another and enriched by the holiness of another. That’s the unity which is good news – for the Church and for the world.”

Rowan reminds us that the unity we share in Christ is not and ought not to be for our sake alone, but for the sake of the world.

Thankfully in every generation, including our own, there have been numerous men and women whose holiness of life and faithful witness to the Gospel enriches and emboldens our own.

I think of all those who in true diaconal spirit would urge us to not only say, “Though we are many we all belong to each other with respect to our life within the household of faith”, but also, “Though we are many, we all belong to each other” with respect to how we address the suffering of humanity and the groaning of the creation through climate changes ranging from mild in measure to catastrophic.

Out of our unity in Christ, may we speak and act in ridding the world of the extreme poverty in which so many people are trapped. May we speak and act in ridding the world of the persistent evils of racism and the injustices borne by Indigenous Peoples in many parts of the world. May we speak and act in ridding the world of the scourge of trafficking human beings for the multi billion dollar sex trade and other forms of exploitative labour. May we speak and act in ridding the world of the perils of religious extremism and the terrorism that accompanies it.

Let us never forget dear brothers and sisters, that the theme “Though we are many, we all belong to each other” speaks not only our life in Christ, but also to the life of the entire human family and our common home, the earth itself. Inevitably, this awareness will call us to ministries of mercy and compassion, and solidarity and advocacy. It will call us into the politic of our communities, our country and the world. And so be it.

“Though we are many, we all belong to each other”. In this great truth, let us rejoice in this Synod. And in the life and labours to which it calls, let us ask God’s grace that we might be enlivened, encouraged and empowered “afresh”, united in the song of each one’s heart,

“Take my life and let it be,  
consecrated Lord to thee.  
Take my moments and my days,  
let them flow in ceaseless praise.” Amen.