

The Church's One Foundation
The Final Homily Of The Reverend Canon Mark Shier
As Rector Of Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church, Fullerton, California
27 September 2009

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord... We sang those words a few minutes ago. They are not only song but truth and comfort and strength. This is our last meditation together, you and I, as pastor and people, and I would not have us forget that the most important person for us is Jesus Christ, our Lord, the Church's one foundation.

We have all had a part in our mission, the Lord's mission, over the past thirty-two years of this rectorate, and we treasure one another. I love you and always will, and I know that you love me, for I have felt your love through thick and thin, tragedy and joy, Easter highs and summer quietness. And God has been and still is at work in that love and in our work. It is what the communion of saints means at its most basic: we are bound together in a unity that cannot be broken, even by separation, even by death. We are Christ's Mystical Body, we are a real organic spiritual unity, we are the community of God's people bound as closely and as surely forever as God's love is close and eternal. Now it is time to make Laban's words to Jacob our own: "Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be a witness between you and me.... The Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent one from another.... Remember that God is witness between you and me." (Genesis 31.44, 49, 50)

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord. This means that the Lord's ministry will continue in this place. He is the only irreplaceable One. You continue to be the people of God; you will still uphold one another in the Lord's love and service; you will still feed the hungry and help the helpless; you will still cherish our children and teach them the Love that is God and that undergirds all our existence; you will still see God active in Her world and in His people. The essentials will not change, though your priest will.

You are in good hands for the coming months. The Vestry and its committees are hard at work administering the parish smoothly and they will soon begin the search process for a new rector. Senior Warden Joyce Wills is competent, careful, and charitable, and she is the chief administrative officer until a new rector is called. Cherish her and the Vestry, be kind to them, be gentle with them, for their work is hard, confusing, and demanding. Do not add to their burdens by being troublesome or gossipy; lighten their burdens with your support and care. Let the Holy Spirit in to do Her work. It will all end well, but it will be a trying process.

Who is this Jesus Christ, who is the foundation of our life and love? My basic understanding has always been that of John the Evangelist: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory,... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." (John 1.1-16) This is the good news of God living and acting in Jesus Christ for the re-creation of the world. It is challenging good news. It challenges us to appreciate the here and now and then to leave it, to

commit to tomorrow and what God will do then. It challenges us to understand what and who Jesus is, and in that understanding we will know God and know ourselves. It challenges us to enter into Jesus' divine work. It promises a destiny with God that is way beyond our imagining. It is a lifetime of work and comfort.

When a man or a woman is ordained, the homily always contains a charge, that is, a challenge and an indication of what the future should contain for the new ordinand. I have a charge for you, as you enter this new chapter of God's story in Saint Andrew's Parish. But before I give my charge, I want to thank you all, thank you for your patience, understanding, support, and love as I have grown throughout the years into this marvelous calling of parish priest; there is no higher calling in the world, I am convinced. Whatever I have become in wisdom, patience, compassion, and love, you have had a huge part in. I am eternally grateful to you for that. I love you and I thank you.

You know my love of history, so you will not be surprised that my charge to you has already been given, almost four hundred years ago. It is in a sermon preached by John Winthrop, Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, in 1630. After listing several problems that the new colony might encounter, he says this:

“Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as his own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways. So that we shall see much more of his wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us,…”

Governor Winthrop continues with this final paragraph: “I shall shut up this discourse with that exhortation of Moses, that faithful servant of the Lord, in his last farewell to Israel (Deut. xxx.): Beloved, there is now set before us life and good, Death and evil, in that we are commanded this day to love the Lord our God, and to love one another, to walk in his ways and to keep his Commandments and his Ordinance and his laws, and the articles of our Covenant with him, that we may live and be multiplied, and that the Lord our God may bless us... Therefore let us choose life that we, and our seed may live, by obeying His voice and cleaving to Him, for He is our life and our prosperity.”

Pause, Then Slowly and softly:

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is his new creation by water and the word:
from heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died....

Yet she on earth hath union with God, the Three in One,
and mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we
like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with thee.

Amen.