

September 21, 2019
Special Council for the Election of a Bishop
St. Matthew's Day
A sermon by the Rt. Rev. James B. Magness

Well, this is it. "It" all comes down to what you do today. There are no more candidate biographies to read. There are no more documents filled with the candidates' answers to questions they've been asked by the search committee. There are no more walk-about to be held. In the parlance of baseball, today you are rounding third base and heading for home.

The only thing you can do before you press the buttons on the voting devices you've been given is pray; pray that God's Holy Spirit will be in our midst and guide us.

This is St. Matthew's Day, a very appropriate day to choose a man or woman who will be your 11th bishop; who will serve in the apostolic tradition of our faith. With all due respect to the diocesan profile that our Search Committee painstakingly and excellently created, it's okay with you, I want to shift away from that for a moment. If we take at face value our collect and scripture lessons, we can build an excellent profile for persons who will follow our Lord as Christian leaders. I believe that above all else, today you will be working to choose your Christian leader.

Are you are still with me? I know it is still early, and today is Saturday. I know that some of you are longing to hear the sound of golf club hitting a ball; that some of you are thinking about your children and grandchildren who at this very moment are competing on a soccer pitch. Still others are walking your dog through the park. Notwithstanding those and other dominant foci in our lives, as your bishop I want you here with me today. What you are doing today is as important as anything that our church ever does. You are about to choose a Christian leader who will serve as your next bishop. Well, who will that person be? As I said, I believe that our collect prayer and our lessons can help us find our way.

You are looking for someone who will "...bear witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ."¹ This is a person who always will be asking about what scripture, tradition and reason has to say about who we are and what we are doing. This Christian leader will always be acknowledging to whom we belong. God's "statutes" and "decrees"² will always be the guiding principal for the person you choose as your next Christian leader and bishop.

You are looking for someone who will "...hold to what you have learned and firmly believed..."³ as a community of faith. And at the very same time you are looking for a bishop-leader who will challenge you when the less functional parts of your corporate

¹ Collect for St. Matthew, BCP p. 244.

² Psalm 119: 33 & 36, NRSV.

³ II Timothy 3:14, NRSV.

ways no longer serve you well and may even keep you from pursuing the mission that God has given you.

You are looking for someone who will “...follow...”⁴ Jesus when-ever, what-ever or where-ever. Have you ever noticed that when someone in the Bible calls out or reaches out to Jesus, that Jesus replies – replies quickly: “Who touched the hem of my garment?”⁵ Therefore, in the tradition of Jesus, your next bishop-leader will be a person who says “yes” when Jesus calls him or her to a person in need. You see, Jesus didn’t mind being interrupted by people in need. This characteristic will be particularly important when the next bishop is sojourning in the hard places of life; when it would be much easier to look away from someone who is in need.

Looking at the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote about this in his 1960s book Strength to Love. King was considering the people who had encountered the man who had been robbed, beaten and was lying on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, and was near death. King wrote, “I imagine that the first question the (passing) priest and Levite asked was: ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’” King continued, “But by the very nature of his concern, the good Samaritan reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’”⁶ Dr. King concludes, “The absolute measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort or convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”⁷

You are looking for someone to serve as your bishop-leader who you want to follow; a leader with whom you can collaborate: who establishes relationships with you in such a way that you are inspired to follow her or his leadership. You are looking for a leader who will help to create a community that embodies and fosters God’s rule on earth.

Finally, you are looking for someone who will seek after those who are outside the walls of our church buildings: the ‘nones,’ the sinners and the alienated people in our midst. You are looking for a bishop-leader who will “...eat with tax collectors and sinners?”⁸ Jesus wanted everyone to know that he came “...to call sinners, not the righteous.”⁹ What could be plainer than that? What could be more liberating?

Who should be your next bishop and Christian leader? This is a weighty decision. I invite you into a period of silence to contemplate and pray – pray that the Holy Spirit of God will alight upon every man and woman in this auditorium.

AMEN.

⁴ Matthew 9:10, NSRV.

⁵ Mark 5:30, KJV.

⁶ Strength to Love, Martin Luther King Jr. (Fortress: Minneapolis, 1977) 26.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Matthew 9:11b, NRSV.

⁹ Matthew 9:13, NRSV.