

SERMON BY LCAQD BISHOP PAUL SMITH

Worship Service at General Convention of Synod

Wednesday, 30 September 2015

Text: Ephesians 2:22

What do you see here today?

Look around you and look at this extraordinary assembly? What do you see?

Do you see people that you knew from youth days? Do you see people you met at last synod? Do you see people you like? Do you see people you don't like? Do you see enemies? Do you see people you plan on avoiding in the coming days?

What does our Lord see?

He does **not** see what we **used** to be. We were once strangers without Christ. We were once people without hope. We were once people who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death.

God **does see** what he has recreated:

His own beloved people – made one in Christ. God sees a new humanity – united through the death of Christ on the cross. God sees a people who are no longer simply flesh and blood, but daughters and sons born again of water and the Spirit.

So, here in this place we are a family - gathered through our common baptism – gathered into God's household of faith. Therefore, this assembly is more than just old friends gathered. We are more than just people gathered on the basis of some familiar human heritage. We are more than differing groups gathered each with personal agendas. We are one body of one Spirit, called to the one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. Since our heavenly Father has gathered his people here, we would yearn to see each other with our heavenly Father's eyes. To see fellow citizens; to see saints; to members of the household of God – centred in Christ who himself holds us together.

Why is our devotion for this Wednesday of Synod given the title 'Confession'?

Because rebellious hearts continually refuse to see each other with our Father's eyes. The sinful flesh would eagerly set out to destroy what God builds. We are made sisters and brothers in Christ – but human hearts get busy, striving to rebuild the barriers that have been broken down through the work of Christ on his cross.

'Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!'

As we begin our journey for this Convention of General Synod - as sisters and brothers in Christ we pray, 'Lord – give us your eyes - to see each other as you see us'.

So, do we need 'spiritual eye surgery' to see each other with our Father's eyes? Eye surgery IS precarious. It usually takes time. Sometimes the surgery doesn't take. In this case, however, the Scriptures drive us to a much stronger action than spiritual eye

surgery: The psalmist teaches us to confess, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit'.

This is not a slow remedial process. This is radical. This is death and new life. To die and rise anew with Christ – to rise with a clean heart - with a new and right spirit - laying aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely. Create in **me** a clean heart, O God. Not create in **him**. Not create in **her**. Not create in **them**. Create in **me**. ... restore to me, the joy of your salvation.

Our text from Ephesians promises that God will be about his Fatherly business – forgiving our sin for Christ's sake; uniting us in this gracious meal of Holy Communion – where he lavishes upon us, grace upon grace: the forgiveness of sin, life and salvation - sending his Spirit amongst this household of faith, growing us – building his Church upon the foundation of his Word revealed in his apostles and prophets – joining us and growing us into a holy temple in the Lord.

Let me end this brief homily with an older Christian woman's Godly wisdom about seeing with our Father's eyes. Her name was Neva. Neva was once talking to me about the way people can be so very judgemental at Church on Sunday. She commented on the things she had heard people say about other Church folk that they watched going forward for communion. Neva was annoyed that people were busy gossiping about other congregation members - focussed on what other people wore that Sunday; checking out who's had a new hairdo; looking spitefully at some; coldly at others.

Neva just wanted people to pray. 'Why don't they just pray for other people?', said Neva. 'That is what the Lord Jesus wants us to do. He wants us to see those people going up for Communion and to pray for them – since he has made us all sisters and brothers!'

We begin our Synodical day today with the sacrament of the Altar – we ask our gracious God raise us anew and to give us eyes to see sisters and brothers in Christ approaching a common altar today ... all receiving the same abundance of forgiveness from the same Lord. I invite you to pray for your sisters; to pray for your brothers: That together – in this Synodical convention, we may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.