

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Greetings and welcome to this the 168th Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee. What a joy and delight it is to be with all of you as we gather in worship to sing God's praise in this beautiful setting here at St. John's Northwestern Military Academy. A number of you have told me that this is the first time you have ever been to St. John's and others have told me that you did not know that it was an Episcopal School. As a member of the Board of Trustees I welcome you to this place and as Bishop of the Diocese of Milwaukee I want to say thank you to the people of St. John's Northwestern for making the academy available to us. Thanksgiving is the theme of this convention and so before I begin my meditation on our theme allow me to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Diocesan Staff and the numerous volunteers who have made and are making this day possible. In the interest of time, I will not run through litany of names as I have done at previous conventions. Allow me to simply say to you all on behalf of those gathered here, "Thank you." I also want to say thank you to all present, delegates and visitors, for giving of your time on a beautiful fall Saturday for this important work of the Church, work which undergirds our life and ministry as a the Diocese of Milwaukee, the Episcopal Church in Southern Wisconsin.

Our theme for convention this year is "a Eucharistic people, a community of Thanksgiving." We reflected on one aspect of that last year in our meditation on the hymn found in the second chapter of Paul's letter to the Philippians. To be a Eucharistic people is to be a people open to self-emptying that we might be raised up by God and be taken, blessed, broken, and given to the world.

As we gather today we hear the words of the prophet Isaiah calling his first hearers and us to "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted." We prayed with the psalmist, "It is a good thing to thanks to the Lord and to make music to your name, O most High. To tell of your loving kindness early in the morning and of your faithfulness in the night season." And we hear the apostle Paul telling the church at Colossae and the Church today that we are to do everything we do in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

The witness of scripture is clear that thanksgiving and the proclamation of God's reign in the world are two sides of the same coin, thanksgiving is proclamation of God's power, grace and blessing and proclamation of God's Power, grace and blessing flows from gratefulness and begins with saying thank you for what God has done. This thankful proclamation is by word and deed, showing forth God's praise not only with our lips but in our lives. This is what it means to be a Eucharistic people.

Sadly, I believe we may have lost sight of this. We confuse the Eucharist with Communion. The Communion is a part of the Eucharist but it is not all of the Eucharist. The result of this confusion and misunderstanding is seen in people choosing not to attend worship unless there is a Eucharistic celebration and resolutions submitted to the General Convention calling for lay lead public liturgies of the pre-sanctified on Sunday mornings. This is sometimes caused by the misguided teaching of clergy who told people as our church was moving to Eucharistic centrality. "if it is not communion it doesn't count," as if God is a divine Santa making a list and checking it twice. It is also seen in a lack of reverence for the sacrament and in the misunderstanding that some have that when the unbaptized are not permitted to receive the sacrament they are not part of the Eucharist. The Eucharist and Eucharistic life and centrality are more than communion.

The result of this misunderstanding is that the Eucharist comes to be seen not as what it is but as what it is not, not as a way of living but as a thing, another part of a consumer Christianity, an attitude that is best summed up in the words of the poem by Wilber Reese entitled "Three dollars' worth of God."

**I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,
but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk
or a snooze in the sunshine.
I don't want enough of God to make me love a black man
or pick beets with a migrant.
I want ecstasy, not transformation.
I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth.
I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.
I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.**

In my less hopeful moments I have begun to wonder if the revolution/reformation which was the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, the culmination of a movement to reorient our Church to a baptismal ecclesiology and missiology, which placed the Eucharistic liturgy at the center of the Churches life if it hasn't already failed, is failing.

You see our Book of Common Prayer sets forth a biblically based vision of a church in which all members are ministers who gather around God's board to feed on Christ and go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit to seek and serve Jesus in everyone we meet. We do this because our primary identity is as a member of Christ's body. Some of us are bishops, priests, and deacons but the most important thing about every member of this Diocese is that we have been born again by water and the Spirit, and marked as Christ's own forever. As the Church, we participate in God's mission to restore all people to unity with God and with each other through Christ. The ministry of the people of God is in and to the world, beyond the red doors not behind them. If we were to live up to this vision, there is no telling what God could do in and through us.

In his address to the General Convention as a candidate for Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry reminded us of the words of the evangelist Billy Sunday, who described the Episcopal Church as a sleeping giant. Sunday said that if the Episcopal Church ever woke up the rest of American Christianity had better watch out.

As we gathered to elect a Presiding Bishop, I could hear that the stirring that signals an awakening. And then we elected one especially gifted for this time in the life of our Church as we seek to be Eucharistic people who go forth in thanksgiving as Christ's ambassadors in the world.

In his sermon at the close of General Convention. as Presiding Bishop Elect, Bishop Curry proclaimed, *"I am more and more convinced that God came among us in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth to show us the way to be reconciled with the God who deeply and passionately loves each and every one of us, to be reconciled and right with that God and to be reconciled and right with each other as the children of that one God who created us all. He came to show us how to get right and how to get reconciled. He came to show us therefore how to become more than simply the human race – that's not good enough – came to show us how to be more than*

a collection of individualized self-interests, came to show us how to become more than a human race.

He came to show us how to become the human family of God. And in that, my friends, is our hope and our salvation, now and unto the day of eternity."

I share that conviction and I pray you do, too.

It is in that context that I hear our Gospel lesson for today- the story of the Raising of Lazarus. The story is found in the 11th chapter of John's Gospel. It contains two of my favorite passages of Scripture, the words of Apostle Thomas, the one who later doubted, who when confronting the other disciples fear that if Jesus went to Bethany he would be killed said, "Let us also go that we may die with him." And Jesus's encounter with Martha which includes their exchange, "your brother will rise again, "I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day. "I am the resurrection and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me. It is after this that our passage begins. Jesus then encounters Mary. She says to him the same words her sister did.

'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' and invites Jesus to go with her to the tomb. John records,

"Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Lazarus Come Out! This is Jesus' word to us this day! Come Out of the tomb and step into life.

I cannot hear these words without being reminded of a poem by the Scottish bishop Michael Hare Duke. I shared the last line of this poem with you in an Easter letter a couple of years ago. These are words that describe the only way out of consumer Christianity, the only way we can ever be the people God intended us to be, the only way we can wake, the only way we can come forth and live in to the vision God has for us.

*Death is the physic;
There is no remedy less radical.
We cannot patch the threadbare goodness with a small square of glory
We have to come to where the fragments must be fused painfully into a unity
By resurrection out of a three days tomb.*

First, death of self-concern...

*{Which stands outside the event
To keep score of good or bad
'How am I making out?'- 'That's better now.'
For we must be born into that action which is all ourself,
Total commitment when the cost's been weighed
Authentic choice to be, with reserves in case it doesn't work.]*

*Then death to judgment of our brother;
The secret pleasure in his faults
The double mind condemning while love wrestles to control*

*Then last of all the death, to set us free
From testing God, setting the scene where he must play **a** part,
Dance to **our** piping
Ratify **our** schemes because we made him **our** patron
Doing **our own** will behind the Three-fold name.*

*Dead, and alive in Christ
We find new trust.*

*[Not flabby relaxation but poised rest
The knife-edge of discernment's still to tread.
But always with the knowledge that he reigns
Both in the choosing and whatever comes
Out of that choice]*

*The grave clothes hold us they are all we know grant us the courage to be loosed
and live. **

The grave clothes hold us they are all we know.

Think a minute. What grave clothes are holding you? Where is Christ calling to you to be unbound and come forth?

Some of those grave clothes, I suspect, are fear and worry. The myth of power and control. Doing the same thing and expecting different results. And of course, the seven last words of the Church, we have never done it that way before. This and so much more are wrapped around us like the clothes which were wrapped around Lazarus.

I have seen the results of this binding in my ministry as your bishop. 6 congregations have closed in the 12 years that I have been with you and with only a couple of exceptions the root cause of their demise was an unwillingness to be the Church in ways that demanded these congregations to set aside business as usual and take the risk of using their resources to do ministry in new ways. The focus was on who was there and what they wanted rather than on who wasn't a part of the community and how are we called to serve them. This grieves my heart.

That is why I am excited for you to hear the presentations by Alice Mirk of St. Paul's, Watertown and Dr. Jennifer Henery later today. Some among us have made the decision to shed the grave clothes and their ministries are beginning to thrive because they are no longer doing business as usual. I am excited by a new partnership between Trinity, Mineral Point and Trinity, Platteville.

Other partnerships are being established across our diocese as a means to share mission and ministry. Trinity, Baraboo and St. John the Baptist in Portage are sharing clergy leadership, a parish and a mission, in hopes of developing shared ministries between the parish and local communities. We are working to build a similar relationship between Christ Church in Delavan and St. John in the Wilderness in Elkhorn.

A multicultural team from across the diocese has been gathering monthly to look at how we can be more inviting to all people in our communities as a first step. And in a follow up step the team is planning how to truly include and incorporate our diverse neighborhoods into our congregations while at the same time learning how our congregations can be incorporated more fully into the wider community.

We are called to be unbound in our ministry in the world. Before this convention comes a resolution that asks this diocese to engage the work of combatting systemic racism. I hope you will pass it.

You will recall that in my address to you last year I asked you “to join me and the other members of the Wisconsin Council of Churches in our anti-poverty initiative.” I have continued in that work over the past year. On Wednesday, I met with a group of leaders to discuss the next steps for this work. I was in the focus group that reviewed a proposed theological statement. It was sent back to the drafting room. One reason was that it was too long. But most importantly, it was sent back because it was too white. White in its deistic, institutional Christendom approach modified by interfaith sensibilities and white in that it made the poor a “them,” failing to recognize the poverty of us all.

You know that I am anxious to engage this work. In early December I will be meeting with Bishops of the Church to begin work on a new pastoral teaching on racism. If we are going to do so faithfully we must be unbound from the myth of power and privilege which has shackled us for so long. We must learn to listen and we must be doers of the Word we hear.

Eucharistic people are those who share the peace of Christ. It has to be more than a liturgical exchange. To share the peace of Christ means to act in such ways that God’s will for peace is made real on earth. It is for that reason that I continue my work with against Gun Violence. Universal Background Fingerprint background

checks and a 48 hour waiting period on all gun purchases may not end all the horrific violence that occurs in this state and this nation. But even if they only save one life (the data shows they save so many more) it is worth the event. The dignity of every human being means every person matters. This week a bill to reinstate a 48 hour waiting period for gun purchases was introduced in our state legislature. I ask you to join me in working for its passage.

Today Jesus calls each of us to come forth and be unbound. He calls us to come forth with joy and thanksgiving for the life which is ours through his death and resurrection as members of his body to be taken, blessed and broken for the life of the world. We serve a living Lord. He is calling us to new life, as congregations, as a diocese, and as a creation. May God grant us grace to answer this call not only with our lips, but in our lives.

*The bracketed sections of the poem were not read in the sermon but are included here.