



## *The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth*

### **Bishop's Pastoral Letter**

To be read in the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth on Sunday, February 8, 2009

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

From today's Epistle St. Paul says: "I do it all for the sake of the gospel!"

Let us pray; Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. *Amen.*

This Holy Gospel that St. Paul gave his life for is well proclaimed in the collect we have just prayed. The Lord Jesus Christ, God incarnate, stretched out his arms in costly sacrificial obedience that all might be caught up in His saving embrace. This collect – this Gospel in prayer – echoes St. John's Gospel "And I when I am lifted up will draw all to myself." This magnetic Gospel is not only our proclamation it is our life, our joy, our hope, and our destiny. To proclaim it in word and deed is the reason the church exists – to proclaim this wide embrace is the purpose of the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth.

This glorious Gospel is given in trust to the community of the Baptized. Our Prayer Book proclaims that "the bond and covenant that God establishes in Holy Baptism is indissoluble." (P298). Those of us who have been buried in Christ's death through the watery grave of our Baptism rise up from the waters as adopted daughters and sons who cry to our "abba" our Father, and hear His words – the same words God spoke to Jesus dripping wet in the Jordan "You are my beloved, with you I am well pleased."

We are His and He is ours for eternity. We greet each other as cherished and beloved daughters and sons of the same Father. We greet each other unconditionally as family. As we gather as the household of God to proclaim the one Gospel, and partake of the one loaf, we find ourselves secure in the costly embrace of Christ's outstretched arms.

Secure in Christ's costly embrace we are free to greet each other as brothers and sisters despite differences of race or tribe, status, language, gender, political allegiances, or ethical views and understandings. Like all families we are free to ponder, discuss, disagree, and discern until we come to the "mind of Christ." We are not free to dismiss, demean, or marginalize those who have a different understanding.

I learned an interesting fact from a Quaker friend recently. The Society of Friends took a century to discern that slavery, though accepted in scripture as a reality, was against the "mind of

Christ.” Interestingly however, the Society of Friends after 100 years of discernment came to this understanding a hundred years before our Civil War! Discernment takes time and patience and trust; however, as long as we remember that we discern as family adopted by God’s action in Holy Baptism we make space for the Holy Spirit to work.

The Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Fort Worth is open for business. Our business is the proclamation of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. We cherish the sacred scriptures as the Word of God because they are, as Martin Luther says “the manger that holds the Word who is Jesus our Lord.” We proclaim the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds as the received summary of Christian belief; we celebrate with joyful obedience the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist as the way we dwell in Christ and He dwells in us; and we are governed by a Bishop whose authority is shared in synods composed of the Baptized, both lay and ordained. These four Anglican principles inform and empower our mission to extend the ever widening embrace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ welcomes you! The Episcopal Church welcomes you! Welcome home!

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. *Amen. Ephesians 3:20,21*

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Bishop of Kentucky and Provisional Bishop of Fort Worth

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