



Matthew 25 Gathering 2017: Anglican Justice and Mercy Contending for Shalom

Clifton Warner – September 29, 2017

Who is one person right now who you want to hold before the Lord and this community? Think of their name. It could be someone you work with. It could be someone in your family. It could be someone for whom you're already fighting, someone you're already fighting for in prayer and in action. Perhaps you're waking up every morning, going to work, and serving because you care about this person. I'm just going to give you a few more seconds, and I want you to think about that name.

All right. Everybody have a name? Here's what I want us to do. On the count of three, I want us all to shout our names out loud. One, two, three. Wow, that was worth it.

We've come from Canada to the border of Mexico. We've come from the East Coast and the West Coast. We've come from parish-based ministries and parachurch ministries. We represent here a spectrum of different races and political views and social backgrounds. And we've all gathered together.

Christine started us off with that word, *gather*, because this is a gathering. It's not a conference. Instead, it's personal. We've *gathered* together as human beings who bring names with us. But we're not here because we decided to pick each other as friends. We're not here because we heard that Phoenix is a nice place to be at this time of year. Ultimately, we're not even here by our own choice. We're here because Christ has gathered us. He is the center. He is why we're here. He's the convener.

Let me review where we've been and what we're all about. As Anglicans, we seek to follow the Lord and to enter the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. We give ourselves away as he gave himself away, and we do that in a way that requires perseverance and contending. We contend for *shalom* through works of justice and mercy.

Daniel started us off with *shalom*. As he said, we want to be a people, as Anglicans, who are doing works of justice and mercy to contend for *shalom*. *Shalom* is where it's all headed. It's the way things are supposed to be. It's the way we ache for it to be, and we know it's not that way currently, so we do works of justice and mercy in partnership with our Lord.

Daniel taught us the distinction between the two words *universalis* and *katholikos* and reminded us that we are not only one holy apostolic church but that we are also catholic. We are the catholicity of the church as the bride of Christ, and our catholicity is a call to be whole. That's the root of the word. He's telling us that we are to be integrated, to be a people held together by the gospel.

In Ephesians, Paul writes this about Jesus: “He made known to us the mystery of his will, which he purposed in Christ to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (1:9). It’s under Christ that that unity comes, that *katholikos*, that wholeness, that being a people of integrity.

We witnessed a beautiful example of this yesterday morning in our conversation about race. When we started off, I mentioned that it can be risky to talk about race in these times. Not everyone has the same understanding or perspective on every aspect or nuance of race relations, but here we had that conversation; we entered that risk together.

Andrea, thank you for taking a risk and saying, “I have a question.” When you asked that question, I felt like things got real and the conversation was honest. It made me believe we could have that kind of conversation as the church. If we can’t, there is no hope. We want to see this kind of conversation happening in society at large, but the church has to lead the way, and you led the way this weekend. Thank you for the ways you all were willing to take a risk.

Thank you particularly to our brothers and sisters of color who are here. I think it was Charles who was saying, “I thought maybe I’d be the only black man here,” and the truth is that we’re still a majority white room. And so I’m grateful to all of you who showed up wondering, “What am I going to hear? How am I going to be treated? What’s going to be my place in the room? Am I going to have a voice?” I’m grateful for all the risks people have taken just to have this conversation, just to be willing to talk about these things as the body of Christ.

So thank you to all of you and for all the ways you've taken risks. It felt like we could have talked all day in just that open conversation, and yet it also feels as though the conversation has just barely gotten started. But it is started, and hopefully what began here will continue in our own places of life and ministry.

Shalom is not only wholeness, an integration of the bride of Christ; it's also wholeness within ourselves. Daniel reminded us of that. This wholeness begins with our own integrity, with the ways in which we are disintegrated and the ways in which we are then integrated and made whole in Christ. That's why we made that prayer room available and why the prayer team has come all the way here to pray for you during breaks and during sessions. This healing prayer team has met with several of you. It's such a vital part of this gathering because an important part of this work of shalom is the healing that occurs within us, the healing that makes us whole.

Indeed, David Roseberry reminded us of Isaiah's words: "Do not neglect your own flesh and blood" (58:7). Those words apply not only to our own families but even to our own literal selves, our bodies. Shalom is wholeness in ourselves, our families, and the church. When we are whole, we can go out into the world, and we can contend for wholeness in our communities through works of justice and mercy. That is integral mission. Shalom is the way things ought to be, joining the triune God in his work to bring unity to all things in heaven and earth.

Justice and mercy. We mentioned at the beginning of our time together that we wanted to talk about this topic particularly through the lens of race. Things are not the way they ought to be in that area. So thank you, Albert, for your word for us. Thank you for your teaching. Thank you

for opening our eyes to our own history as a nation and as a denomination. Thank you to the panel who responded to our questions and shared from their own stories.

We need to own our history. I think that became very clear to us. We need to own our history as a nation; we need to own our history as the church; and specifically, we need to own our history as Anglicans. Our own record as Anglicans is not good. Albert reminded us that while we can name William Wilberforce as part of our Anglican Communion heritage, we also have to be honest about our national heritage and our church's heritage, a heritage that includes bishops who were slave owners, bishops who even fought for the right to own slaves. And thank you, Albert, for introducing us to James Holley, who fought slavery and then became the missionary bishop to Haiti. He is now, for me, among the heroes of our faith.

During our panel discussion, we were reminded that the racism in our country did not end with the Civil War but evolved and that there are still some systemic injustices in education, incarceration, income, and at least ten other areas. We have a long way to go.

So where do we start? Maralee, you helped give us a sense of this. I loved the language you gave us about the microculture, macroculture, and theoculture. The concept of *cultural humility* especially struck me as a helpful way to think about race. How can we learn cultural humility in conversations about race? How can we understand the biases and the assumptions of our own culture? How can we be more aware and sensitive to the cultures of others, and how can we be lifelong learners?

Then Bill Walker talked to us about the sacrament, sharing with us resources that are already within Anglicanism to pursue works of justice and mercy that contend for shalom. The quote he shared from Jürgen Moltmann stuck with me, and I want to bring it up again here. Moltmann indicates that the sacrament can't merely be the "unbloody repetition of the event that took place on Golgotha."¹ At the altar, the body and blood of Christ can't merely be a repetition that is unbloody. What did he mean by that, and how does that connect to our work? It means we can't come to the table to receive the benefits of Christ all dressed up and cleaned up. We can't come to the table to receive the benefits of the cross of Christ while neglecting to lay down our own lives. There is still a bloodiness about it, and it's *our* blood, in a sense. We are pouring out our lives. We're laying down our lives. We can't receive the benefits of the cross and then walk away and not lay down our own lives.

Instead, there is this kind of ongoing participation through the sacrament in the real presence of Jesus. In the sacrament we join the fellowship of his sufferings, and that extends into our ministries where we lay down our lives. We also know the joy of the resurrection and that we will receive new bodies and that Jesus is the firstborn of the new creation. That is our hope. That is the shalom we look forward to. We come to a table from which we are then sent out, and we're going to be sent out from that table in just a short while.

And now we have been reminded by Erin that we are contending and that our contending can only be sustained by being fruit in the sun, by being trees planted by the stream. If we try to do

¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 40th Anniversary Edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), 53.

this using our own resources, we won't make it; we have to be rooted from the inside out so that we are drawing our life from God. In this way, Erin reminded us that we are not alone.

When the steering committee first met together a few years ago, we asked, "What's the point of this? Why are we doing this?" And one of our very explicit and primary purposes was that people would come from around Anglicanism in North America and look across the room and have conversations and make friends and realize, "I'm Anglican; I care about works of justice and mercy; and I'm not alone in the combination of those two things." And you're not. You're not alone.

I hope you'll stay connected to each other throughout the year. I hope friendships and connections are made here. I hope that partnerships might even grow out of some of those connections. For example, because of networking and friendships that started at a Matthew 25 gathering, the Anglican Multiethnic Network was formed, and we hope partnerships like that continue to spring out of this gathering.

We hope you'll come again next year and bring friends, and we hope God is building a community here. Even if we only meet once a year together, we believe that God is building a community here and that years from now people will say, "Those Anglicans really care about my suffering. Those Anglicans really care about justice. They really care about seeking shalom, and it's not just talk. They're doing the work as a community."