

**7 Pentecost 2003**  
**The Answer is Not Blowing in the Wind**  
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I read the other day that if you're using your cell phone when you're driving your car ..you miss 50% of your visual environment. In other words ..you're not driving that thing ..you're pointing it ..because you don't recognize half of what's around you ..or at least you don't process what you recognize. Response time is worse than a drunk ..really ..worse than a drunk and ..researchers at the University of Utah found ..it takes a cell -phone- a -holic 18% longer than it takes a drunk to get back up to speed if something causes him to stop or slow down ..like ..oh, say ..a traffic signal.

If you're going to do it right ..it takes ALL of your attention. The number of near misses and fender benders goes up as you become less involved in the act of driving ..when it becomes "second nature." Like those things you say you could do in your sleep.

Living a life worthy of the calling of Christ is the same way isn't it? If we profess to be of Christ ..to be Christian ..we are proclaiming to a world ..that is already skeptical in the least ..often downright suspicious of the Jesus crowd ..that we believe that He is the Son of God ..and that by his stripes we have been healed.

So as we go along each day ..facing a number of decisions ..some big ..some small ..some mundane ..some monumental we are reminded of Paul's letter to the Ephesians to **live your life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.** Okay ..I'll go to church ..and tithe ..and help out at Christmas ..but wait ..there's we're called to live **with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** It's not just a personal private life, it's life IN COMMUNITY with other Christians who are often different from us and not entirely likeable to us. What's that about the "UNITY OF THE SPIRIT" .. ..the "BOND OF PEACE?"

The unity of the Spirit and Bond of Peace is what makes our fellowship and communion possible. It makes us ..in all our variety ..The Body of Christ together. We who are many and different and sometimes causing friction with each other become ONE in Christ. This is a fundamental reality for Christians and Christian community. We are not a mere affinity group.

This complicates things. Self righteous isn't enough. UNITY OF THE SPIRIT ..what's up with that? If what we think is challenged ..if what we want is disregarded ..if we are slighted in the Spirit some how ..Paul says we are to consider the finally .."does it build up the body of Christ."

Paul tells the Ephesians **There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.**

BUT ..to build up the body of Christ ..you can't sit on your goodness and do nothing. Each of us is called to do two things 1) not do the things that destroy the unity of the body; Don't go for the throat ..go for the heart, 2) contribute our part to the body of Christ ..to build it UP. St. Paul says in I Corinthians (11:33) 'When you gather together to eat the Lord's Supper, wait for one another.'

A great variety of gifts were given ..by Christ ..**to equip the saints** ..you and me ..**for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.**

Each person has a unique and indispensable contribution to make. Each has gifts of the Spirit that can be used to build up the body of Christ ..something you can do that, when shared, advances the kingdom on earth. Right now ..here at St. Peter's this type of Spiritual Gift discernment is going on with the Network class. There's a new bulletin board that tells you about it as you enter McCray Hall.

As you go about your life ..as you encounter decision making situations ..weigh the good and bad ..the ups and downs ..the pros and cons ..the pluses and minuses ..muse ..ponder ..consider ..deliberate ..whatever form of examination you like ..but in the end decide ..based on building UP the body of Christ. Does what you are doing ..or not doing ..build up the Body of Christ?

Paul warns the Ephesians that they should **no longer be as children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.**

Good advice for us too. Ours is an instant gratification culture ..we are pummeled with information ..it comes at us from all directions ..we're hyped into submission ..convinced that we "deserve a break today" that we're all victims and bear no personal responsibility for anything that happens in the wake of our pursuit of what we're entitled to.

In today's Gospel ..Christ appears when the wind is tossing the disciples little boat ..they are sure they're going to die ..the wind is roaring ..they're far from shore ..Christ tells them **Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.**

There's advice in that too ..and great comfort. As long as we are in Christ ..whatever way the winds blow ..how ever much of what we've got today ..we don't have tomorrow ..we must "take heart" ..we must "not be afraid."

There are winds of change blowing the Episcopal Church about today ..and doctrine that is "strange" to our tradition. We are all aware that the General Convention of the Episcopal Church begins this week. We're also aware of the "hot button" issues that are tossing us to and fro.

Consecration of an openly homosexual Bishop ..authorization to consider a liturgy for the blessing of same sex unions. There are also other issues that are very important to the church ..including consideration of ordination directly to the Priesthood ..doing away with transitional Deacons.

The House of Bishops and the House of Deputies will debate all of it ..prayers will be said for the guidance of the Holy Spirit ..*we said one this morning* ..words will fly ..tempers may flare ..there'll be a vote.

If you pay attention to the media you might get the sense that the Episcopal Church is on the brink ..in the hand basket ..headin' where the sun don't shine. But I think they're wrong. I believe every one of the individuals ..in either house ..who has a vote ..will pray about these issues ..and all of the others ..will bring to bear those gifts of understanding provided in the Spirit ..and, as Bishop Charles Vache ..retired from the Diocese of Southern Virginia ..told a parishioner ..vote FOR something ..not against anything.

If those voting ..in purple or not ..pay unwarranted heed to the blatherings of the culture ..in a media that it often seems would welcome a tragedy ..they could either be cowed into something they might other wise not accept ..or be *driven* to it ..to show they're not swayed by what actually is swaying them.

In the end there will be substantial and passionate disagreement the outcome ..whatever it is ..may really annoy you. That's where Grace comes in.

Perhaps making bold leaps into the promises of a warm and fuzzy ..PC world ..where the Episcopal Church appeals to every breathing being ..is too much at this point in our history. Perhaps it will drive out members ..on the other hand ..perhaps it will attract others . Is that the goal? More people? Could we be big without being right? Which is the right decision? We must pray for Grace to truly understand for ourselves and for the convention.

The idea of grace in the Bible is often a bitter pill to swallow. It hits you right in the roots of your human pride, self sufficiency, and independence. We don't want to think of ourselves as helpless and in need of salvation BEFORE having earned praise. We want salvation as a prize and not as a gift.

In the midst of the storm winds and the gusts of strange doctrine in the church there is a solution, a way of maintaining the health and bringing healing to the body. Paul also writes that we must speak **truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.**

The standard is high ..grow up in every way into him ..into Christ. We weaken the body when we withhold our gifts ..when we allow anger, fear, partisanship ..and greed to drive our decision making instead of truth in love. Truth is ..speaking the truth in love can often be painful. But weigh it against a lie ..and the pain is bearable ..preferable. Truth without love is harsh - you conservatives. Love without truth is hollow - you liberals. But ..together they bring healing and transformation.

Whatever happens this week ..next week healing will be needed. When issues are decided ..a compromise may satisfy the majority ..but there are always those who feel betrayed ..or lost ..or some how empty when its all over ..so we must pray for healing.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has written this prayer to the Bishops of the Episcopal Church "May God the Holy Spirit give us 'right judgment in all things' and bring to mind our joyful dependence on each other for our spiritual health and growth as we seek the right and faithful way forward in each of our situations.

The convention needs our prayers ..but, if you think about it ..the machinations of a thousand minds attempting to function as one ..is not unlike our lives. When all of the parts are healthy and functioning ..so while we pray for healing for our Church ..let us pray also for our community here at St Peter's ..for each of our relationships ..for the people we don't like ..and the one's who don't like us ...that we might love with truth, bear with one another, and maintain the unity of the Spirit.

The answer, my friends, is **not** blowing in the wind. So ..in the storm ..do not fear the man walking on the water ..he is not a ghost ..he is your redeemer. Embrace Jesus as He embraces you ..open your heart and your mind to his healing presence ..and the waters will calm ..the wind will cease.

**AMEN**