

# Church of the Good Shepherd and St. John the Evangelist

21 Pentecost  
October 5, 2008  
Fr. Bill McGinty

## **“Stones, Rules and Tails”**

In Westminster Abbey in London, the great Anglican Cathedral, there is a stone. It is no ordinary stone, it lies beneath the coronation throne of the Monarch. It is called the Stone of Scone or the Stone of Destiny. For Seven hundred years every King and Queen of England has been crowned seated above the Stone of Scone.

What most English people don't know is that the Stone of Scone does not belong to England, but rather belongs to Scotland. Before 1296, it had been the crowning stone of the Kings of Scotland for over one thousand years. The English and Edward I simply stole it. Ever since, generations of Scots have asked for it back, claiming that the stone is important to them and is tied to their sovereignty and national identity.

Famous stones in famous places have also held pride of place in many countries around the world. Jesus in today's Gospel speaks of a stone that can unite people. It is a stone that has been rejected. It is the stone that holds the Kingdom of God together. Jesus is the stone, around him all else is built. All else finds strength.

Paul in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading wants to say the same thing to the Philippians. “Whatever you may think or say about me,” says Paul, “pales in comparison to what I have found in the person of Jesus Christ.” Just knowing Christ is enough for him. Christ has been that significant in his life. He is his rock, his foundation.

In five days time the entire diocese of Bethlehem will gather in Reading at the Annual Convention. Delegates from 66 churches and the fourteen counties of the diocese will travel to be united around the Bishop as we prepare for a new church year. Central to that gathering will be the Eucharist at 8:30 on Saturday morning when the assembled body will pray the Liturgy with Bishop Paul. Beyond all the problems, resolutions and needs of our diocese is surely the conviction that we seek to find Jesus Christ as the answer. We have a diocese in which 26 churches struggle, both financially and in other ways. We have growing problems on how to feed and care for the poorest in our midst, in a time of recession. We have a need to reach a generation of young people who have never experienced poverty; nor do they know Jesus Christ; nor is church, the Gospels and religion a part of their vocabulary.

The language of today's readings is so applicable to our present National situation. Those of us, who are older, despair that all our generation has worked for, the values and laws we hold dear, are fast disappearing. Like Israel in the Old Testament we need a stone to cling to. We need law and rules that give us certainty because without those guidelines we know that our society is lost in a wilderness of its own making.

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Night after night we watch CNN or Fox news and we hear of Corporate Corruption, greed and deregulation. We look at our framed 10 Commandments hanging on the East wall of the church and we realize that they are every bit needed today as when they went up in 1902, or when God gave them to Moses around 1350BC. We smile when we look up and read “Your shall not covet your neighbors goods, or his wife, or his property or even his donkey and we think of some poor Israelite coming home to Camp to find his tent gone. But when we check out our 401K and find that gone too, somehow it doesn’t seem so funny.

Maybe, then we realize that God’s rules make some sense. Rules, laws, regulations, we all complain about them when they get in the way, or they are inconvenient. Yet, when they are not there, we equally complain that now we are victims.

Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel tells a story about what happens when we lose our center and we take our eye off God and his law. We turn Paradise into our own version of hell. The story of the Landowners is the story of how hard work and vision can be rewarded, but the tenants in the parable, decide that they will ignore the rules and the law, in favor of their own greed and self interest. The result is theft, dishonesty, violence and murder.

It is Jesus’ version of the story of man’s fall in Genesis. The vineyard is the Garden of Eden, transformed by man’s inability to keep God’s law and live by his code. It is a return to the state of chaos that existed before God brought order, life and beauty into existence with creation.

Our own lives can be like that also. When ever we desert order and the right way, we inevitably find disaster and chaos. Jesus’ lesson to his disciples is that God calls us to do things the right way. We are called to conform to God’s way. In doing that, we have Christ as our rock, our stone, our cornerstone.

I ask all of you this morning to pray for our Diocesan Convention this week. Pray for our Delegates, Bertrand, Ann Marie, Chellie, Fran and Susana. Pray that from the chaos of recession, poverty and the many problems of our church, we may find answers that begin and end with Jesus, and lead us towards his Kingdom.

Today is also the last Sunday of our Stewardship Program. Pledge card in hand, we walk up the aisle today to place it before the Lord. It is a mark of our faith and commitment, that he will care for us in the coming year and that we will care for his church and work for the realization of his Gospel. I thank you all on behalf of the Vestry for your annual offering to support your church and this ministry.

Finally, today we have the blessing of the animals at 11:45am. We choose this day because it is closest to Oct 3<sup>rd</sup> and the Feast of St Francis, their patron saint.

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They have no problem with today's readings. They do not want to take over the vineyard or kill the owner's son. Given a biscuit and a pat on the head they will obey all the rules. They know about love and affection, they ask little in return. They return us so easily to a little piece of paradise, with a wagging tail when the long days work is over. They are never late for dinner and don't talk about us behind our back. Unasked they will keep the couch warm for us till it is time for *60 Minutes*, or *Best in Show*. Today, we thank God for our animals and pets; we bless them and pray for their health and wellbeing in the coming year. They have already pledged their love for the year and left a deposit with licks and kisses. May God bless our furry friends in the year to come and keep them healthy and safe.

Amen+

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