

BISHOP SALMON'S BIBLE STUDY FOR LENT 2009

Begin each session in the five Sundays with prayer. Use the Collect for Ash Wednesday, pray for your congregation, its clergy and people, and its ministry in Christ's name, pray for the diocese and its mission, then use one of the collects for Easter day. Let the focus this Lent be in the Diocese of Fredericton, its bishop, clergy, congregations and the Mission God has in store for it.

Don't change the focus in these sessions. Pray for others and other matters in another setting.

Beginnings in many instances provide a kind of DNA for dioceses and parishes. The Diocese of Fredericton has a remarkable story. Bishop Medley was Bishop for over 40 years. What was the beginning like? What were the obstacles? Why were so many congregations able to be started and churches built under such difficult circumstances? Can you describe the missionary vision?

The circumstances in which we live out the Mission of the Gospel to the world we live in change dramatically from time to time. Planting churches was the first missionary vision in the nineteenth century. The slate was mostly blank. Today we are called to Mission in a very different situation. In some areas of the diocese the general population is decreasing due to mine and mill closings, causing population to migrate to jobs in Alberta. There are fewer children in these small communities, and when they grow up they usually migrate as well.

The result is to place severe stress on many congregations. i.e. A small group to maintain property, pay expenses, sometimes part time clergy or none at all. Lenten Study should include statistics that give an honest picture of the context for the mission in the 21st century and thus a realistic picture of decisions that need to be made.

On the positive side there is evidence of a new spirit of cooperation and sharing, and an emerging awareness that the Holy Spirit can empower us to do whatever the Mission requires. God's grace was sufficient when the diocese began, and it remains more than sufficient today.

1. What decision will empower Mission? What changes does everyone need to make? Start with yourself before talking about what others should do.
2. It is fair to say that maintaining the status quo is actually to continue to decline?
3. What is the best use of your resources?
4. What are you currently doing that should cease or drastically change?
5. What new things need to be done?

March 1, 2009

Genesis 9:8-17

God made a covenant with Noah. Never again a flood to destroy all living creatures. God made the covenant. God is faithful.

1 Peter 3:18-22

For Christ died for our sins once and for all. He, the just, suffered for the unjust, to bring us to God.

Mark 1:9-15

The time has come, repent and believe the Gospel.

As we reflect about the circumstances in the Diocese of Fredericton, and our congregations, we stand on the firm foundation of one who is faithful, who came to us, who died for our sins – a love and grace that will not let us go.

What is God asking of us as we think of our Mission for the 21st century? What do we need to repent of? Let go? What risks do we need to take?

Lent 2 March 8

Genesis 17:1-7,15-16

Abraham was 99. God said “I make this covenant, and I make it with you, you shall be the father of a host of nations ... as for Sarah your wife, I will bless her and give you a son by her.

Romans 4:13-25

The promise was made on the ground of faith, in order that it might be a matter of sheer grace, and that it might be valid for all of Abraham’s posterity.

Mark 8:31-38

But Jesus rebuked Peter, “Away with you Satan”, he said, “You think as men think, not as God thinks.

Looking at the incredible promises of God on our behalf and his sheer grace, how is he asking us as disciples to think as we prepare the Diocese and our congregations for Mission in the 21st century. Try to think of what God may have in store for us.

Lent 3 March 15

Exodus 20: 1-17

The Ten Commandments are another sign of God's faithfulness and his covenant. In Christ the law is fulfilled not rejected.

1 Corinthians 18:25

The doctrine of the cross is sheer folly to those on the way to ruin, but to us who are on the way to salvation, it is the power of God. ... God has made the wisdom of the world look foolish.

John 2:13-22

He upset the tables of the money changers scattering their coins. He then turned on the dealers in pigeons "Take them out he said, you must not turn my father's house into a market." If Jesus came in our churches today what would he say to us about the way we live and our stewardship of His grace, money, buildings, gifts etc? How do they contrast to the wisdom of the world, if at all?

What does He want us to do? What vision for our Mission in His name?

Lent 4 March 22

Numbers 21:4-9

On the way they grew impatient and spoke against God and Moses. "Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in the desert ...? So Moses made a bronze serpent and erected it as a standard ... so they could look on the bronze serpent and recover.

Ephesians 2:1-10

And in union with Christ Jesus he raised us up and enthroned us with him in heavenly realms, so that he might display in ages to come how immense are the resources of his grace ...

John 3:14-21

This Son of Man must be lifted up as the serpent was lifted up by Moses in the wilderness so that everyone who has faith in him may in him possess eternal life.

Honestly talk about the struggles we face with businesses and people moving, the struggles of maintaining small rural churches, the burden falling on a few ... Are we holding up Christ for strength and discernment as we claim our Mission for the 21st century?

Lent 5 March 29

Jeremiah 31:31-34

The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with Israel and Judah ... I will set my law within them and write it upon their hearts ... I will forgive their wrong doings and remember their sin no more.

Hebrews 5:5-10

Because of his humble submission his prayer was heard, son though he was, he learned obedience in the school of suffering, and, once perfected, became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him ...

John 12:20-33

And I shall draw all men to myself, when I am lifted up from the earth. This he said to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

These lessons should be both a source of strength and comfort as we seek to discern God's will for us in terms of decisions we need to make to have a powerful witness in our Mission, and at the same time remember that obedience is costly and involves suffering and loss. What might that look like?

Palm Sunday

I recommend that the Passion Narrative be read aloud as it is in church, and those hearing it see if they can translate the people's looking for a Saviour and King to get rid of the Romans into how we might take the Church and use it to our own purposes and needs? Do we value outward things too much? Since salvation is only going to come through the cross what do we have to do in order to be faithful in our Mission?