

Amazed by Jesus

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Preacher: Bishop Don Harvey

[0 : 00] I want you to hear me say what a joy it is to be with you here at St. John's Shaughnessy this morning. It has been almost one year ago to the day that I last worshipped with you in this particular manner.

I remember that even with my failing memory in age. Not so much that it was such a wonderful service, though. I think it really was. I enjoyed it immensely. But because it was on the same day as the Grey Cup game here in Vancouver.

And while I was given free reign for let the Spirit move me as long as it took to give my message, it was also mildly suggested that people who were here this morning and wanted to go to that game would need a little time for getting there.

And so today, with the game being in Winnipeg, it's important that you be home by 3. But not necessarily before that.

But I guarantee you that you will. I want first to bring you greetings from the Anglican Network in Canada, of which I have been called to be the moderator.

[1 : 15] But you know, in doing that, in many ways, I'm bringing you greetings from yourselves. And I'm so happy with that because as I move across the country, and I do that alarmingly frequently at the present time, it is good to see how other people in the country are looking toward you for inspiration and leadership.

Of course, with that comes a heavy responsibility as well. But from the time that you took the momentous move of standing up and saying, no, this is not good enough, you have been a marked people.

This has been a marked congregation. And I rejoice in that. Because in some ways, St. John's Shaughnessy has become the flagship to this movement, which I believe with all my heart is a movement from Almighty God.

And if I didn't believe that, I would be doing what most retired people back home would be doing, raising chicken or whatever, whatever becomes someone far different from their usual role in life. Before I leave this particular subject, because that's not what I'm going to be talking about today, I want to just say, as I said at the earlier service, thank you not just for being faithful, but for being willing to share your rector, David Short, with the rest of Canada.

[2 : 39] There may well be times when you're looking forward to him being there, and you hear that he's down in St. John's, Newfoundland, which is about as far away from this St. John's as you can get. Please realize that the larger church sees the leadership that he is providing for us, and that there are people who hang very closely on his word, because it is so obvious it is a word coming from God.

And as the early Christians in Corinth and Ephesus and Philippi would have loved to have Paul stay there, to be with them all the time, they had to be content with sharing him with the other churches as well.

And so, with all my heart, I say, thank you for the sacrifice you make, and he makes, in doing that particular thing. Some years ago, when I was rector of a parish in the other St. John's, that's always confusing out here, when I hear people talking about St. John's, and they mean St. John's Shaughnessy, I automatically think about St. John's, Newfoundland, where I live and lived most of my life.

But in that St. John's, the government decided to build a taxation center, a regional taxation center for all of the Atlantic provinces.

And for some, maybe a mix-up, they decided it was going to go in Newfoundland, and we rejoiced over that. And the director of the center was from my parish. And so he said, on the day when the

Minister of Revenue comes down to open this building, I'm going to invite you to come in and to say a prayer over it.

[4 : 14] Now, I realized almost immediately that the building over which so much cursing, no doubt, will go on down the road, when income taxes got returned to people, without the check, that this building would need a nice blessing, for no other reason.

And yet, how do you bless a taxation center? And then it occurred to me, maybe the Spirit led, not maybe, the Spirit did lead me into the passage of St. Matthew's Gospel, which is the Gospel for today.

People, for the longest kind of reasons, trying to trick Jesus up, trying to put a question to him that whichever way he answered, he'd be in trouble with somebody. That seems very familiar today, really, with a lot of the questions were asked.

But this question, do we be faithful to the state, to the government, or do we be faithful to God? And they paused. And the story, as we just heard it read, is so wonderfully inspired and dramatic.

He said, show me a coin, whose is the picture on it? And then those famous words, render to Caesar, to the emperor, the things that belong to Caesar, but render to God the things that belong to God.

[5 : 34] It's an easy passage to remember. It's an easy one to stick in our minds. It's not so easy, though, to really get the impact of it, because many people today have used this as a justification for a complete separation of the church and the state, the church and the government.

And no doubt there have been times in the past when either the church has been in the government's pocket, or more frequently, the government has been, less frequently, the government in the church's pocket. And neither one of those was a good thing.

But neither do these words of Jesus mean what people are trying to make them mean today, that you have the government on one side, you have the church, God on the other side, and there's a great gulf fixed between the two of them, and never the twain should or ever will meet again.

And you know, it seems to me that in the country we're living in today, a country we're proud to be members of, that that particular philosophy, is becoming very much entrenched.

And we have so many examples of political correctness being brought to its worst possible extreme.

[6 : 51] Political correctness, whereby these efforts to say, just a simple thing like taking the name Christmas out of Christmas and calling it a holiday. More seriously, what happened in Ontario last week, when at memorial service, Remembrance Day services, school leaders tried to take the cross out of the Flanders Fields episode, and have the children recite things without the cross being there, because they say it would be more inclusive for everybody to take the cross away.

And how they ever got around then, reading McCrae's famous poem, In Flanders Fields, the poppies grow, amidst the crosses, row on row.

The crosses were the predominant thing there. And the crosses represented the sacrifice. And so you get political correctness brought to its worst extremes. And it has many extremes.

I suppose the worst one being, went on after the 9-11 catastrophe, when our government gathered on Capitol Hill with thousands of people trying to express their emotions and their concern over what had happened, especially to our neighbours to the south, that the decree went out from the Prime Minister's office that no prayer was to be offered on that occasion in any public manner.

That's a very serious thing to happen. In my own province, which was supposed to be the cradle of... What's the best word to use?

[8 : 31] There's lots of words you could say we were the cradle of. But in particular, old-fashioned ideas were looked upon as being still entrenched in us.

So much so that in the Parliament, in the Legislative Assembly, right over the speaker's chair, in gold letters, and I've read them many a time, or I tried to read them, they're in Latin, but I know just enough Latin to be able to know what they mean.

And the words mean this, Seek ye first the Kingdom of God. That's a good motto for any province to have. And yet, when one of our members of the legislature brought in a motion that at the beginning of each session they would have a time for prayer, it was resoundingly defeated.

Again, showing that those of us, those of the, who we elect to put in power are under some apprehension, misapprehension, that there is this great divide between church and state, and any reference to church at all is a bad thing.

Any reference to God is even a worse thing. And I suggest, and I feel very strongly, that this whole context of render to the state, to the government, to Caesar, the things that are Caesar's, has to be balanced by render to God the things that are God's.

[10:02] And in fact, when you look at it, it is simply by being closer and closer to God as we move into the government sphere that we can be influencing that and what happens there as well.

And this is the area that we have to try to do it. When people come knocking on your doors, they will, I guess, next fall sometime, when they're, by legislation, now the federal election has to come at a certain time, how often, instead of just asking them what they're going to do about pensions or old age security, all of those other important things, we put pertinent questions to them and say, how do Christian principles stand with you when you try to legislate rules under which we, as a one-time Christian nation, are still supposed to live.

And if we don't do something like that and exercise our democratic right to make the government, we deserve what we get. And that's not very much sometimes.

And so, while this is not political speech in any way, shape, or form, I think we have to realize that it is the responsibility of the follower of Jesus Christ to be able to exert the influence that he has on our lives in all aspects, be they when we're here in church or when we're somewhere else in the community.

You know, the whole concept in the gospel, which I said this morning I was going to preach on, was made even clearer when I read the first lesson, the epistle from Philippians.

[11:47] And there, we have it made quite clear where St. Paul says that we have to be imitators. And I'll get to that in a moment. But as happened, let me mention a particular case.

A year and a half ago, the then government of Canada changed the whole philosophy under which our country had been developed.

and they defined quite unequivocally a new definition for marriage which has to spill over into family life and has to spill over into other forms of life as well.

And the prime minister of that day, Prime Minister Gretzian, who claims to be and still does claim to be a devout Roman Catholic, was turning his own back completely on what the government, on what his spiritual leader, we call the Pope, had decreed on such an issue.

And indeed, his successor carried on in much the same way. The Roman Catholic bishop of Calgary, whose name escapes me at the moment, but I have a great admiration for the man, actually said, I owe it to you, Prime Minister, as a Roman Catholic, to tell you that your soul is in danger because you are not practicing what you are supposed to be believing.

[13:22] And in fact, and I'll remember forever and use forever in sermons that wonderful example he gave, he says, your faith, your Christianity, can't simply be something that you put on like a coat when you go into church.

Spend the hour or the hour and a half there saying and doing things that other people are saying and doing. And then on the way out, you take it off and you hang it up in the porch and say there, that part of my life is over till I come back again next Sunday and put it on again for that service. And it's a ringing condemnation, but I think it's a very accurate one. We cannot compartmentalize our lives in that way if in fact we put on the mantle of Jesus Christ in our baptisms, if we proclaim that even further when we came to confirmation and came to our own personal contact with Jesus Christ whenever that was and made our decision to be Christ's.

When we reach that stage, we cannot say, fine, that's good for my Sunday, but we will use, I will do other things that will get me re-elected or will get me more money or will get me more customers by going with the flow.

And the great danger the church is in today is by going with the flow. In my second last year as bishop, before I retired, so I'm still bishop, but as a diocesan bishop, I remember going early to a church and I was dressed in a purple cassock, a little bit deeper than this, but not much, and the drapery behind the altar was the same color.

[14:56] And I got there early and so I sat down in the back trying to get ready for the service, confirmation service that was coming. And a young server came in and he started going around doing what good servers do, putting up hymn numbers and all this sort of thing around the church and getting things ready, humming away to himself, completely oblivious to me being there until I coughed, frightened the life out of him.

He turned around and he said to me words which I believe in some ways came from God. He said, Bishop, I didn't realize you were there. You blended in to the surroundings.

That frightens me even now when I tell it because how true it was for me at that point as a bishop in order to keep peace in my diocese, in order to try to be well-liked, go down in history as the bishop who was well-liked by everybody.

I was blending in to the society that was happening and I wasn't standing out. And that condemnation just doesn't go to a bishop. It goes to every one of us who put on the Christian mantle that we have to be responsible for what we're doing and not blend in, have the courage to stand out.

And indeed, we must be prepared to get a lot of unpopularity because of that stand, but brothers and sisters, if we are followers of Jesus, we have no choice.

[16:28] But one other aspect I want to develop here for just another moment is when Paul speaks in this epistle today, he says, he doesn't say, I want you to join in being imitators of Jesus as he does in other places.

In this epistle, he says, be imitators, join me in, no, join in imitating me. He's saying, imitate what I'm doing.

And I find that disturbing. I agree with it, but I find it very disturbing because there's no way after 43 years of ordained ministry I can stand before you this morning.

I just can't stand before you and say, I'd like for you to imitate my lifestyle. I wish I could. Beyond all measure, I wish I could. But I haven't reached that stage after all of these years.

And many of you, I'm sure, haven't either, that you could say to someone, if you want to be a Christian, do what I'm doing. Every day. It's frightening. And yet, I feel it is something that we have to work towards because if we don't, if what, if our Christianity is just words, we have failed.

[17:45] Christianity is more influenced by our actions than in our words. and ultimately, the time might come when we could say, join me in imitating what Jesus did.

Because he says, there are some of you, some of you even now, who claim the name of Christian, who are doing the very opposite and are enemies within the church, enemies to the cross of Christ. And I don't have to elaborate some of the ideas that are going through my mind as I say it. Let me conclude with a story which is not a story because I heard it directly from a person some years ago now.

And it has tied in so much with what I'm saying this morning that I want to share it with you. It came from a man who spoke to me when I was taking a course, an ecumenical course, in Rome.

Well, about 20 years ago, or maybe more. Time does go. He was Japanese and he was a Jesuit priest in the Roman Catholic Church. And he had not obviously been born a Christian.

[18:51] And he was in the Japanese army during the war. And he was in a place in Japan when the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima. And many of his relatives were killed and all of his property was annihilated, leveled to the ground.

And he, like a number of others, had the awesome responsibility of going back and trying to start off from scratch and build up anew. They were so indoctrinated, there was so much hatred in their hearts as they started to replace what had been destroyed by the so-called enemy.

Anyway, building supplies were at a real premium. And you had to struggle and sometimes steal what you could get in order to build before the bad weather set in. This man could find most of what he needed except nails.

He couldn't find nails anywhere. And he figured there might be some nails on the American base. So one night after midnight, he found a hole near the gate and he crawled in through it and went to where he was told he might find some.

And sure enough, there were these bins with nails of various sizes. And he took the pack sack from off his back and he knelt down there in the mud and started picking up these nails and stuffing as many as he could into the pack sack.

[20:04] And in the middle of this process, he became aware that he wasn't alone. There was someone standing beside him. And when he looked up, there was this American in an army uniform, but on each shoulder he had a cross.

Obviously, he was a chaplain. A cross on each shoulder. But this didn't mean anything to my Japanese storyteller. And he expected immediately to be arrested and whatever was done to criminals at that time.

But instead, the chaplain said to him, What are you doing? He said, I'm getting some nails to rebuild my house. I can't get them anywhere and I need them. It's all I need now.

The chaplain, instead of calling an alarm, knelt down there in the mud beside this man and helped him fill his pack sack. And then he let him out. This man went home and that way, no matter how he turned, he could not sleep.

He tossed and turned, as we say. He knew that something was happening to his life and he couldn't tell what it was. The next morning, just at daybreak, as the gates of the base opened, he went in, legitimately this time, went to the building that had this same figure of a cross over it, knocked on the door and out came the chaplain.

[21 : 21] The chaplain's first words, he said, More nails already? To which he said, No. Forget about the nails. I want you to teach me how to be like you.

Teach me to be like you. Wouldn't it be wonderful if people we meet today or next week or the week after, having observed the way that we're living in our various places of occupation, in our homes, might say to us, How can I be more like you?

Might it be wonderful? Wonderful compliment to the way that we are living the life of Jesus Christ. And I leave that thought with you.

But like all or most Anglican preachers, having said to you that was my last point, I'm going to take liberty and give you an even extra last point, which won't even be as long as this one.

But I want to leave it to you because I'm not just here preaching as a preacher. You certainly have a monopoly on that in this particular parish. And I mean it when I say that.

[22 : 34] You get very, very sound preaching here. I'm also standing before you as the moderator of the Anglican network. And it is not your intention, and I think it's a good thing as Reverend David Short has told me, to use the pulpit to talk about the network to any great degree.

And yet I feel I would not be loyal to network if as I shared the gospel and the epistle with you, I didn't finish up on one other note. And it is not a terribly political one, but it is one that I want you to keep in mind.

Because we are on the brink, I believe, if I didn't believe it, I'd probably be out chicken farming too. I believe with all my heart we are on the brink of a whole new manifestation of this church we love so much.

And yet it is not going to be an easy breakthrough. And from time to time I get very discouraged, well, somewhat discouraged, about just where we're going and how we're going to get there.

And three weeks ago I was in Toronto to speak at a great anniversary celebration for Dr. Marnie Patterson, the great Anglican evangelist who for 40 years now has led a group called Invitation to Live Ministries.

[23 : 51] And in that time has preached to more people around the world than any other Anglican in Canada. And so we were giving thanks the way God has used him for 40 years of ministry, this nature.

And the night before he was driving me to my hotel. And I was telling him about some of my fears and worries as well as some of the joys I was experiencing.

And he said to me, Don, when you go home, when you go to the hotel, take out your Bible. It's almost like the, we heard when our first lesson was read, if you don't have your Bible with you, you'll find the Gideon in most hotels now.

But I did. I had an experience a few years ago so I never go into the pulpit now without my Bible. But that's another story. I'd have to go on for two extra points to tell you that. So that has to be another time.

But, he said, take out your Bible and before you go to bed, read 1 Corinthians 16, 9. You just remember that, 1 Corinthians 16, 9.

[24 : 56] Because if you go looking it up now, you're probably not, you're going to miss the point I want to make. And you'll have plenty of time to read it afterwards. But there, Paul, they want Paul to go to another place. And he says, No, I'm going to stay where I am, at least until Pentecost.

I feel I have to stay here. because, he says, a wide door for effective work has been opened for me. Which is fair enough. But then he goes on with five more words.

And there are many adversaries. The door is open, but the adversaries are there. You won't be able to just flow into it and do what you want to do. There will be people, well-meaning people, or people who think they are well-meaning, who are going to try to stop you.

And I want to say to you, St. John's, Shaughnessy, where, for the rest of us in Canada, especially in the Niagara area today, where two parishes are voting as to whether they will join the network, parishes that are being hammered relentlessly by their dioceses not to do this particular thing. So it's still going on. Those of you who have passed some of those hurdles, to realize that we still have that door opened. You know, because we have come as far as we have, doesn't mean we are there not by a long shot.

[26 : 10] And we, probably even yet, haven't seen the adversaries that are there before us. But the door is open, and we have been called in a very real ministry to go through that open door and to move as God's instruments in ministering to ourselves, but also to that great number of faithful Anglicans across Canada who literally don't know what's going on.

They're so confused by the various reports they hear. We've been called to minister to them not just by the words we say, but by the kind of life we are living and the courage we have in standing up for us.

You opened that door for us, or I suppose God opened the door, but you were one of the first to perceive it. It is my plea to you, it is a plea with all my heart, that you not become weary with well-doing, but in fact will make sure that door stays open, and regardless of the obstacles that may be there, you will say, we know where God is calling us to go, and we encourage you to be imitators of us, because we are doing our best now to fulfill his will.

May God grant you the courage, the zeal, and the desire to do just that. Let us bow our heads in prayer. O blessed Jesus who came to save us all, help us to love and to serve you, and to bring others to you.

Bless us in this service today, and may your word equip us to go forward to be used in your ministry. and this we ask in your holy and precious name.

[28 : 03] Amen. God bless you all. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.