

Where We Are, Where We're Going

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[0 : 00] 65 years ago, Bishop and subsequently Archbishop Adam Urias de Foncier determined that the future of the West Coast Terminal, of those railways which bind our country together, that the terminal would be Vancouver, not Port Moody, not the royal city of New Westminster, after which this diocese was named, but it was clearly going to be Vancouver and the center of the diocese should be a cathedral to be built halfway between Coal Harbor and the Fraser River on a height of land that was owned mainly by the Canadian Pacific Railways and named after a director of that company, Thomas Shaughnessy.

The once heavily wooded area of land had been cleared of trees. Many CPR people had built homes as well as the great homes of some of the lumber and mining families of British Columbia. The church began with a chapel in the basement of the Seahouse of the Archbishop, where an eight o'clock communion was held every Sunday, and a church school was established in the afternoon, and we are grateful to have some folks still among us who attended that church school in the basement of the Seahouse, which stood just behind us here.

It was called the Seahouse because it was both the residence of the Archbishop and the central office of the diocese. This parish was incorporated in the early 1930s.

It began as a parish for the people of this community in 1925, and so it is this year that we celebrate the 65th anniversary.

[2 : 06] A framed church was built, and I think it's on the back of your bulletin if you want to see it. A framed church was built, which served as a church and a hall, all done by private donation and a gift of the CPR of the whole land on which the church now stands.

It was acquired when there was a kind of vacant lot where most of you are sitting. Apparently there was a police station over on that corner of the block over there, and the church and the Seahouse were between here and Carche.

The establishment during the war of a veterans hospital, Shaughnessy Hospital, meant that there was a need to provide some social life and diversion for the long-term patients wounded in the wars who came to Shaughnessy Hospital.

As well, a social center for the young people of the community, which in those days was their social life was largely centered in the church. And last night there was a Saturday night dance to commemorate one of the great founding realities of this parish, which was that it served as the gathering place for young people for the whole city for a long time of a Saturday evening.

When the war was over, Dr. Larmuth was the rector. The need for a larger and a better church, larger church and a better church school gave rise to a plan, which the whole community got behind.

[3 : 48] To build a church as a war memorial to the young men and women who served and many who gave their lives in the Second World War.

And that window up there is a tribute to that fact that this is St. John's Memorial Church. And that window is on the front of the historical booklet, which you will have been presented with this morning, which in point form gives you much of the history of St. John's and much of the history of the building and the windows and the memorials by which you are surrounded.

In those illustrious post-war days, a general of the army, an admiral of the navy, and an air vice-marshal of the air force got together and Dr. Larmuth, and they persuaded that this church should be built as a memorial.

You will see again on the back of your bulletin that the first proposed church, which wasn't the last, which wasn't what actually happened, was proposed in the late 1940s for a cost of \$100,000.

It actually went above that. It went up to \$150,000. And the peculiar gifts of Dr. Larmuth in raising money meant that the building was completed and actually 40 years ago, the 18th of June, the first services were held in this church and this building.

[5 : 32] And so it is partly that that we celebrate today and we have celebrated it in different ways. Now, that's the sort of historical background.

Let me turn now to Deuteronomy chapter 9 to give you a point from which we can, I trust, under the instruction of God's word, gain some perspective on where we are and where we're going.

So, in Deuteronomy chapter 9, page 163, in your pew Bible, you will see the story which Theo Dumoulin read for us as the first lesson this morning.

The book of Deuteronomy is one which is a kind of second look at the law of Moses.

It's one of the most quoted books in the whole of the New Testament with more than 80 quotations from the book of Deuteronomy and stands with Genesis, Psalms, and Isaiah as those four books which were the main reference points in the writing of the New Testament.

[6 : 52] It is considered to be, over the history of the church, unsurpassed in its influence on domestic and personal religion. A very formative and exciting book and one you might well read to be reminded of the roots of our life as the people of God.

I would that you could read the whole thing. By examining one small passage of it as we do this morning, you get at least a glimpse of the whole that you encounter in a moment of time in the word of God.

That we take these few verses and look at them. Now, I want you to remember this sermon because of the letter P and the points I want to make all begin with the letter P.

The first one, it was a people who needed to hear. It begins, Hear, O Israel. Israel was the people of God.

Israel is the people of God. We are a people of God. The terrible erosion of self-centered individualism makes it almost impossible for us in Western society to understand that we belong to each other.

[8 : 16] you may get some glimpse of it by coming to church on Sunday morning, but the reality of it has not seeped deeply into us so that we are locked together as a people of God and it's undoubtedly God's intention that we should be.

And those people were because they had wandered together totally dependent on one another for 40 years. Yes, indeed we have.

But they were locked together as a people of God to hear the word of God. It is my custom at least once a week to sit while somebody says, May I have your attention, please?

We are now arriving at Village Bay on Main Island, the transfer point to Saturna Island. You leave the ferry by the car deck and please don't leave any of your belongings.

and I've heard that so many times that I can't hear it anymore. But when we had been to Africa and had left Mombasa Airport and Cairo Airport and Amsterdam Airport and Vancouver Airport and then for the first time in over a month we heard, May I have your attention, please?

[9 : 36] It was good news. And what I long for us as a congregation is that as we come together and hear the all too familiar words of morning worship, it might be good news for you in a very special way that you will thrill to the reality of those things with which we have become so familiar that we've almost forgotten the meaning of them.

And so as we sing, who is the King of Glory? When we say, O be joyful in the Lord all ye lands, those things should move us to the very depths of our being.

When we turn to the scriptures, we need to be moved. And that's why Moses begins by saying, Hear, O Israel. And why we need as a people to hear, O St. John Shaughnessy, to hear the things that God has to say to us as a people.

That's the first thing. The second thing is a point in time. Forty years of wandering in the wilderness, they now are at the Jordan River.

They're about to cross over into the promised land. They've arrived at that point. And we, like them, though we may delight and rejoice in all that has been in the past, we are still committed to going forward.

[11 : 04] We may luxuriate over tea this afternoon from three to five in all that has been, but the challenge that lies in front of us is to go forward into the future.

The third thing I want to tell you about is the present predicament of the people of Israel. And they recognized it fully. There lay the Jordan River, deep and wide.

that they had to cross over. And there beyond the Jordan River were the sons of Anak, who were all nine feet tall, as they imagined them to be.

Plus they had cities, this nomadic people coming up against the great cities, which were, as they saw them, fortified right up to the sky.

How were they ever to challenge these people of this land? they had impossible problems in their present predicament to cross the Jordan, to attack this country, and to claim it as theirs.

[12:11] Well, the fourth thing that you need to know about is that the people who occupied that country were a people who were perishing with pride.

that they had made their city, that they had claimed their land, that they had built their cities, fortified up to the sky, that they were the greatest people of all the world.

They had this, but the very seeds of pride were the reason that they would perish. And the Lord said to his people as they stood on the banks of the Jordan, Ah, the Lord your God goes before you as a devouring fire.

He will destroy them, he will subdue them, he will drive them out. Violent, eh? Well, that's, that's the same, though, you know.

That our birthright and our heritage and our inheritance from the Lord our God has been claimed by people who do not honor the name of the Lord our God, nor do they acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ and it doesn't belong to them.

[13:26] And yet they've claimed it. They go on claiming it. And it's not theirs. It belongs to the people of God.

Meek shall inherit the earth. We won't do it in our strength. We will do it because our God is a consuming fire.

I'd like to stop there because I hope that raises enormous questions in your mind that I've said that. But be disturbed as you like. It can't do you anything but good. And so, the next thing I want you to look at is the presumptuous pride of the people of God who God knew because he had dealt with them for so long.

He knew that their pride would be presumptuous. And the danger that might mark us today is that we have a presumptuous pride. And this presumptuous pride Moses addresses and says, you are not to say it is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me to possess this land.

Moses says to them, no, you are a stubborn people. It's not because of your righteousness. It's not because of the uprightness of your heart. You know and don't you ever forget that you provoke the Lord your God to wrath.

[14:54] You have said Sunday by Sunday concerning the 40 years. 40 years long was I grieved with this generation and said, it is a people that do err in their hearts for they have not known my way.

The Lord was ready to destroy them for their stubbornness that they had provoked him to wrath. They had refused to acknowledge him as the Lord their God.

Well, you see, it's just that. That we are that kind of stubborn people and God cannot bless us according to our deservedness.

I think I told you about someone who said at the end of his long life, I think I got what I deserved and I shuddered inwardly because if we get what we deserve, we're going to be in deep trouble. We really are. You look over the lists of the names, look over the people who've been members of this congregation. Remember that when this church was built, there was up to 70,000 Anglicans in this diocese.

[16:21] There's now 20,000. And people have turned away from following God. People have turned away from the covenant of baptism.

People have turned away from the covenant of marriage. People have turned away and turned away and turned away so that it's not because of our righteousness that God has blessed us. There must be another reason. That reason is given to us unmistakably when Moses tells us it's the prevailing promise of God.

I am the Lord your God. From one generation to another, we have nothing but God's promise.

A promise which he swore to our fathers Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. That's all we have is the promise of God. That's the only possession we have.

[17 : 21] We are, in a sense, a nomadic people. Here we have no continuing city. We own nothing but the promise of God. The prevailing promise of God.

So that we on this anniversary day can look at our past and say God has led us wonderfully and provided us an arrogant, stubborn, rebellious, defiant, self-sufficient, and proud people. God has nevertheless remained faithful to us and he has absolved us and he has enabled us and we have so much for which we can give thanks to him this is not a feast of self-congratulation. This is a feast of praise to almighty God who in his love and in his faithfulness and in his persistent and prevailing promise has been faithful to us and in this we rejoice. as for the present we are as those standing with a great river to cross impossible and impossible obstacles to faith.

[18 : 42] Do we turn back and go wandering for another 40 years and the tragedy of watching people turn back into the wilderness, turn back with a hankering for Egypt and the bondage of Egypt, turning back from the grace of God that has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ to spend the rest of their earthly life wandering aimlessly.

That's enough to break your heart when you see it and when you feel the temptation to do it in yourself. Ahead are great obstacles.

the river Jordan has been considered a great point at which all the great decisions of life are made as we figure it if we stand at the edge of that river and wait for the water to be opened up so we can cross as we face the Anakim, as we face the great cities, the great established institution of our secular materialist godless world, as we face all that, our hearts might fail us, understandably from a human point of view.

What somebody has described as the kind of great institutions that are being established in our day of ethnic tribalism and the myth of progress and the devastating impact of technologies, things like the Soviet Empire breaking down and our own country coming apart at the seams, there are great problems, but there is a far greater promise.

And so for the future, our business is by faith to claim that promise. you take on, we are to take on the battle, but the victory that is to be won is a victory for the whole of the world.

[20 : 48] It's for all men everywhere, in every language, in every nation, in every part of the world. You see, salvation, salvation, in Revelation, it says, salvation, the salvation, the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ are to be established.

That is our faith, and that is the promise that God has made to us, that this will happen. The salvation, the power, the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ will be established. And until that is established, the great inheritance that belongs to the whole of humanity will not be realized. So that we need to go into all the world and preach the good news of the gospel.

We need in the face of people who are defiant and rebellious, as we in our hearts are, to claim the promises of God. That's the special function we have as a church.

That this building, that this congregation, that these people might bear witness to the purposes of God revealed in Jesus Christ. That the end of our humanity is that the salvation, the power, the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ will be established.

[22 : 21] I feel like an idiot on the sofa saying that. God has been faithful, and the world is so alien to the world in which we live.

But if our world doesn't have that promise, if the world doesn't live by that hope, we have nothing and worse.

will continue to guide and direct us.

though hopeless humanly speaking, the river Jordan deep and wide, the only hope we have is that the Lord who brought us through the Red Sea, the Lord who led us through the 40 years, will continue to guide and direct us, and we live by his promise.

And we celebrate the future because though our enemy is greater and mightier than we are, though their cities are fortified up to the heavens, and our enemies are great and tall, but we know that the Lord, the King of glory, goes before us.

[23 : 33] We know that our God is a consuming fire. We know that no matter how invincible the enemy, we have the Lord's promise. We are not to make the great mistake.

We're not to get caught in the terrible delusion. We're not in the moment of thankfulness to open the door to disaster. by saying it is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me to possess this land.

That is the great lie. The only claim we have as we give thanks for the past, as we rejoice in the present, and as we look for to the future, is that God has promised, and because he has promised, we know that the one thing God cannot do is to go back on his promise.

And as he has made that promise to us, so we on this anniversary Sunday claim it afresh. Claim it in our own hearts. Claim it for our families.

Claim it for our life together as a congregation. Our celebration is not a celebration of all that we have accomplished, but a celebration of God's faithfulness to us in the past.

[24 : 52] His presence with us as we face an unknown future full of human foreboding, and the certain promise, the certain hope that what he has promised he will fulfill.

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

Amen. .