

Epiphany V Sermon I by Bishop Michael Hawkins

By the Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins

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Why am I still an Anglican? Why bother? Why stick it out? Within Canada, we are sorely and sadly divided, and the presence in the Church of those with whom you so fundamentally disagree is a constant irritant. And none of us can pretend that ours is the perfect church. It does wear, all this disagreement. Why stay in such a compromised, divided, confused Church?

The only real answer I can offer today, for myself and for you, is Matthew 13.30: “Let both grow together until the harvest.” (It sounds a bit like the oft quoted Gamaliel principle which, by the way, is not Christian. He is the Jewish teacher who recommended to the Council about the apostles, “Let them alone, for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to

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nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; You might even be found opposing God!)

Let both grow together until the harvest. We hear the opposite call from both sides in our Church today. Everyone it seems wants to purge the Church of those who disagree with them. Anglicans have been plagued by the often unhelpful and uncharitable battles between High and Low Church parties, and between Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics. But the call now is to simply purge the Church of dissidents, while both sides argue about which is the dissenting party.

Let both grow together until the harvest. That verse accounts for what we call the mixed Church, a place where wheat and tares grow side by side, a place where premature and presumptuous judgment is avoided when possible.

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He said, “No, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.” There is a rash impatience to the servants in Jesus’ story, which is compared with the patience of the householder. And the point is, that there is a rash impatience among us, which is to be compared with the patience of God.

God is patient with us, more patient than we are with ourselves and with one another. God is patient with us, he gives us time and place to repent, to turn to him, to show ourselves seeking to live as his good wheat. Patience means a willingness to both wait and suffer. In the stories of the world and of our lives, in their length and in their centre, we know the patience of God, who waits in forbearance towards us. He does not wish that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance, and he suffers out of love for us, willingly dying on the cross and forgiving us our sins.

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What Saint Paul calls us to show in the Epistle is a reflection of the mercy we have known and received of God in Jesus Christ. Where can we know and find mercy, compassion, kindness, humility, long-suffering, forbearance, forgiveness, and love, but in Jesus Christ? “Even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye.” This is the principle, that we are to forgive as we have been forgiven, to reflect and share what we have known and received of God, by Jesus Christ. And it is this imitation of Jesus, this likeness to Jesus, which is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds and lives. We are to be merciful even as our Father in heaven is merciful, to be as kind and sweet and gentle and loving towards one another as God has been with us in Christ.

We are called to give as freely as we have received. This is the principle of Christian living, for we believe in grace, we

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know and trust in the free and unmerited favour and love of God, and Christian living is gracious living. This is the principle of Christian living: “Freely ye have received, freely give!” Those are words to live by. First, we must receive. God first loves us, forgives us, and shows his mercy on us. His grace comes first, and we are to receive that grace.

But then we are bound to show and share the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give as freely, generously and graciously, as we have received. And that means that we are called to put up with each other, and the choice we face in the Church is to put up or put out. Many choose the latter, and it is a tragedy. Loving, and forgiving, and putting up with one another are not optional in the Church, the body of Christ, the family of God. People choose their own grudge over the forgiveness of sins, their taste and preference over saving fellowship, their righteous

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indignation over the eternal mercies of God, their snobbishness instead of the humility of our Saviour. And that choice, that decision not to put on long-suffering and forbearance and forgiveness, may well be the difference between barn and burn.

For when we refuse to forgive, to be patient and kind with one another, we are denying the very forgiveness and kindness and patience we need. Our refusal to forgive amounts to a refusal to be forgiven, and this will come as a dreadful surprise for many on judgment day. And it will surprise them, not because they were not told, not because the principle is somehow hidden or difficult to grasp, but because they refused to hear.

There will be a judgment in the end, and God will require an account of what we have done with what we have been given. And his greatest and most expensive gift is the forgiveness of

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our sins, bought at the price of Christ's own suffering and blood. So, even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye. For it is by that full-grown fruit that the good seed, the children of the kingdom, will be recognized.

He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed means the sons of the kingdom; the weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.