



The Rt. Rev. Mary D. Glasspool
Report to the
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It continues to be such an honor and a privilege for me to serve with you all in this Diocese of New York. Working with Bishop Andy and Bishop Allen, with the entire Bishop's Staff and the Staff of our wonderful Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and over the whole of this diverse Diocese – from Staten Island to Saugerties, from Callicoon to Amenia – with all its challenges, history, hopes and dreams – it is still a privilege – and my daily prayer is to always treat it as such, never taking for granted the blessing it is to me.

Fellow Servants and Chairpersons with whom I work most closely are tremendous leaders in their own right, and I thank them by name in order to at least nominally acknowledge their faithfulness and service: Judi Counts of the Global Women's Fund; Nigel Massey+ of the Global Mission Commission; Nils Chittenden+ of the Campus Ministry Committee, and Mary Cat Young+ for Youth and Young Adults; Carla Burns of the Anti-Racism Committee; Cynthia Copeland and Richard Witt+ of the Reparations Task Force; Winnie Varghese+ of the Social Concerns Commission; Bishop-elect Jennifer Reddall+ – understandably outgoing Chair of the New York #MeToo Task Force, and Nora Smith+; Curtis Hart+ of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission; the words *thank you* do not seem adequate – yet by God's Grace and for our purposes today, let them suffice.

I've been thinking a lot about *Building Beloved Community*, and how we go about doing that. And I think that, just for today, given the brokenness and woundedness of so much in our Church and in our Culture, I want invite us to reflect together on one aspect of God's Mission for the Church – and that is *to reconcile the world to God through Christ*. What is our role in the ministry of reconciliation? I found myself drawn to several scriptural texts as well as an extra-canonical piece of literature. Here is the latter:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
All the king's horses and all the king's men,
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

Every illustration I've ever seen of this well-known children's nursery rhyme has depicted Humpty Dumpty as a giant egg with a face and sometimes, human clothing. But if we look closely at the text, we will see that there is nothing in the text itself to indicate that Humpty Dumpty is, in fact, an egg. We don't know if Humpty Dumpty is male or female either, because the text repeats Humpty's first name rather than using a personal pronoun. All we really know from the text is that Humpty Dumpty was originally sitting on a wall; and then, somehow, fell off. We can interpret that the wall must have been high, because the fall, we are told, was "great." The Latin word for "great" is "magnus;" but since Humpty Dumpty was originally written in English – that's irrelevant. We can also interpret that Humpty apparently experienced a great deal of brokenness as a result of his/her/its fall – because, we are told, no amount of human effort could put Humpty back together again. In this children's nursery rhyme is depicted the human condition, including the futility of our trying to fix the world in which we live and everyone in it, all by ourselves.

In acknowledging that each one of us is a broken human being in need of healing and reconciliation; let us also acknowledge that the *world* is broken and in need of healing and reconciliation. We understand that none of us can "fix" ourselves, let alone someone else. We gather together, as the broken Body of Christ in the world, to build community – koinonia – so that we can receive God's abundant grace, and be renewed for our own ministry of reconciliation in the world.

In the Christian Tradition, we talk of the Garden of Eden as humanity's original Utopia, and our subsequent fall from God's grace through *original sin*. Without going into the *whys* and *wherefores* of original sin – that being another whole meditation – we can still acknowledge that in the Christian Tradition, we have experienced sin as causing *alienation* on at least four different levels: 1) alienation of humanity from nature; 2) alienation within the human community;

3) alienation from oneself; and 4) alienation from God. Our scripture speaks to us of the promise of *reconciliation*, which is the antidote to alienation. Let's examine this.

*The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea. (Isaiah 11:6–9)*

This passage from Isaiah speaks to us of reconciliation within nature and between nature and humanity. Isaiah paints an idyllic picture in which no animal will prey upon another. Each kind of animal will be fully nourished, and shall live together in peace. The *little child* who will lead wolf and lamb, leopard and kid, calf and lion and fatling together, is *not* the messiah of the future that Christian art and poetry have created. The *little child* of Isaiah is simply that: a child. The child here represents human innocence wandering free in a becalmed bestiary. The child leads because trust between the child and the created order is not broken. The child also retains the capacity for trust. Both of these things: reconciliation with nature and trust among power structures are huge parts of the great longing quest of our time.

In order to prepare ourselves for this level of reconciliation, we must first look at, identify, confess, and then *change* the many ways in which we deal destructively with this fragile earth, our island home. We waste; we kill; we strip mine; we dump chemicals; we ravage natural habitations for our own out-of-control needs; we build pipe-lines and destroy villages in the name of almighty technology and development; bigger is always better and the land is simply

there for our use. And only now, in the early 21st century, do we human beings begin to have a sense of the earth's rising up against us in rebellion over how she has been mistreated throughout human history. If we truly desire reconciliation with nature, we will work for ecology and strive to be good stewards of God's earth and all of God's creatures.

Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, speaks of reconciliation in the community. He says, *May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Romans 15:5–6) In Paul's day it was Jew and Christian, Christian and Christian. Paul identifies visible Christian and human unity with God's glory. The bond of unity between Jews and pagans, and among all people is, according to Paul, Christ Jesus. Christ as reconciler of humanity is not presented as dogmatic formula; nor is Christ used as one party's weapon against another. Rather, the credentials Jesus manifests are humility and servanthood – and these are to be the credentials of his followers as well.

In 1987 a documentary was produced by Pierre Sauvage entitled *Weapons of the Spirit*. It is the astonishing and true story of a conspiracy of goodness. *Weapons of the Spirit* tells the story of a village in France named Le-Chambon-sur-lignon, during the Vichy Government and subsequent Nazi occupation of World War II. When the French Army crumbled and the Nazis moved in, the village pastor urged his parishioners to resist, using the *weapons of the spirit*. The mostly French Huguenot peasants did just that. Quietly and discreetly, they gave refuge to over 5,000 Jews, many of them children. What is striking about the documentary is the uniform response of the entire populace to desperate Jews they barely, if at all, knew. Some of their acts were definitely heroic, such as Pastor Trocme's refusing to deliver a list of resident Jews to French Police who drove into town with buses they never filled. Mostly, though, the Jews were saved through quiet, peasant shrewdness and tenacity and goodness.

The key to the placing of the refugee children and adults was that nothing was ever spelled out. They arrived; the locals understood and gave them refuge, even when it meant depriving themselves of food they could eat themselves or sell to bolster their meager incomes.

What is equally striking is that witness after witness, including couples, appear uncomfortable on camera, reluctant to talk about what all of us would

identify as their heroism – when to these people, what they were doing was just their Christian duty – no more, no less. To a person: the majority Huguenots (who were Protestant), the minority Catholics, and a handful of Christian Fundamentalists – none of them attempted to *convert* the Jews. In fact, there was great respect for and provision made for the resident Jews to worship in their own tradition. But to a person, all of the villagers, living with the precept of basic Christian duty, sheltered, protected, and cared for their guests. And when it was over – it was over. No horn-blowing. No reaping the benefits of heroism or fame. Just God-given life, continued in peace.

The film leaves one with the question: *Why doesn't this happen more often? Weapons of the Spirit* demonstrates what a reconciliation in community looks like. For us, the questions are: *What are the gulfs across which we are almost incapable of seeing reconciliation? Rich and poor? Developed and so-called under-developed societies? Fundamentalist and mainline religions? Clergy and laity? Addicted and recovering?* Can the immense reconciling of the human community in Christ be inspiration in these divisions, as it was for Paul in the divisions of his day?

What about alienation within oneself? and alienation from God? The biblical figure who comes immediately to my mind is John the Baptist. That John speaks to alienation within the self is evident in his attack in Matthew's Gospel on the Pharisees and Sadducees – who were, after all, coming to him for Baptism! *You brood of vipers!* he screams at them. *Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.* (Matthew 3: 7b–9a) John challenges their *motivation* for coming. He challenges the *sincerity* of their repentance. They can no longer assume that membership in the Covenant community is assured simply as a birthright. Their claim on the Covenant, says John, must come from their own, manifested fidelity to the Covenant. The reign of God is at hand. Repentance is necessary. Only fidelity to the Covenant and the mercy of God will save them – and us. *Bear fruit that befits repentance...*

There are aspects of our internal alienation that are our own doing. John the Baptist urges us to repent, which means to drop our habitual spiritless mentality and be prepared to accept a radically new one.

But even when we've repented, and done all we can do to turn ourselves around, we still, like Humpty Dumpty, need some help putting ourselves back together again. Along come the king's horses and the king's men in the guise of Good Advice, Moral Uprightness, Good Intentions, Good Therapy, Good Deeds – even the Church – and lo and behold – they start applying band-aids to our deep wounds! Instead of doing the radical surgery that is absolutely necessary if we are to survive, they apply a little first aid cream and a piece of tape and tell us everything is going to be all right! But the brokenness is still there. Why doesn't this work?

These *king's men*, so to speak, cannot ultimately put us back together because they did not make us to begin with. Only the One who made us in the beginning can put us back together again. That is what the Gospel is all about. That is what Jesus Christ is all about. The story of Jesus, the Christ, is precisely the story of how God helps humanity to pick up the pieces and put them back together again. Paul says it this way in his Second Letter to the Corinthians:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

There it is in a nutshell. The gift of reconciliation is God's. Our part is to *bear fruit that befits repentance*. Our part is to respect and care for the earth, for each other, and for ourselves. Our part is to strive for justice and peace, and respect the dignity of every human being.

God's part is the gift of reconciliation through Jesus Christ our Lord to all who are prepared to receive it. It is to receive this gift that we gather here together, with eager longing.