



The Anglican Church of Canada

## General Synod 2010

### Closing Eucharist: Homily by Archbishop Fred Hiltz

General Synod 2010  
St. Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia  
Closing Eucharist  
Homily delivered by  
The Most Rev. Frederick J. Hiltz, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada

Stephen Reynolds writes in his book *For All the Saints*, “There were twelve apostles and then some—some others who never belonged to the original companions of Jesus, but who were also called apostles because they were ‘sent forth’ to proclaim the gospel.” Today we remember one of those saints, Barnabas.

As I reflected on the life and witness of Barnabas, and then alongside that on the things that we have been about in this General Synod. I was overwhelmed by the number of parallels.

Barnabas is our man!

He was among the company of those who believed in Jesus. The Acts of the Apostles reminds us he rejoiced in the Grace of God. He exhorted everyone to be faithful to the Lord and to one another in the Lord.

And in this General Synod we have celebrated the Grace of God. The Grace of God poured out over this wonderful diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island celebrating its tricentenary on *A Journey Just Begun*.

We have rejoiced in the Grace of God as we have heard stories of faith and commitment, particularly through partners and guests of the General Synod.

We've heard exciting stories about the Grace of God at work through *Fresh Expressions* of the church. We've seen with our very eyes and heard with our very ears the Grace of God at work among that wonderful group of performers who presented for the first time *Roots Among the Rocks*. What a grace-filled group of young people who are going to grace this church as they embark on their cross-country tour.

Barnabas was a missionary. He had the heart of a missionary. And through *Vision 2019* we've renewed our heart as a church in the service of God's mission. We've renewed our commitment, as we say in *Vision 2019*, to know and love and follow Jesus in serving God's mission. The Marks of Mission of the worldwide Anglican Communion have been explored through our Bible studies each morning.

Barnabas was a mariner. He knew the sea. He knew boats and sails and riggings. He knew calm and balm. He knew storm and drenching spray. He knew deep channels and treacherous shoals in and out of all those places he and Paul travelled. He knew what it was to lift his sails and feel the winds of God and chart a new course when necessary. And in this Synod we have lifted our sails. Time and time again the image has surfaced in speeches and songs and prayers. You never know, we might just sing *I Feel the Winds of God* one more time before we leave.

As a church we've recommitted ourselves to launch out in new directions, to chart a new course. The status

quo will no longer do.

*Vision 2019* has enabled us to think about where our priorities need to be as a church and about the practices that will enable us to realize those priorities.

We've charted a new course with respect to matters of governance. Who would have thought that we could come out of this General Synod with very different ideas about the composition of General Synod or the size of its council? We had superb presentations and debates around those resolutions and we had the courage by the Grace of God to do something different.

In Indigenous ministries we have accepted the invitation from Indigenous peoples to chart a new

course. We have repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery, which signifies a new course, a new way of looking at one another, of beholding one another, a new way of respecting one another. All is made in the image of God; some being beautiful and some being beastly. We've taken a significant step as a church in charting a new course for how we work and live together in the spirit of Jesus Christ. We now have the appropriate canonical recognition for the office of a National Indigenous Anglican Bishop currently held by Bishop Mark. Finally ACIP and the Sacred Circle are enshrined in those documents that reflect who we are as church. We have celebrated some wonderfully sacred moments in the realizing of the dream for self-determination in the spirit of a New Agapé.

What a joy to welcome for the first time into General Synod as a bishop Lydia Mamakwa. And what a beautiful sight the other day to see all the Indigenous persons in this synod, here on the podium, celebrating with us and calling us into deeper and deeper friendship and partnership in the service of the gospel.

Barnabas was also known for his capacity to encourage. And we've experienced, I think, a lot of encouragement in these last nine days. We've experienced encouragement from those who have spoken to us and with us; encouragement to deepen our partnerships through global relations; to deepen our ties with the diocese of Jerusalem; to deepen our commitment as partners in the pursuit of peace in the Middle East and throughout the world. They have encouraged us and the

Spirit has moved us to be a people of encouragement in the world where there is so much discouragement. They've moved us to be people of hope in a world where there's just so much despair. They've moved us to be people who are generous in a world where there is just so much greed.

Barnabas was generous. One of the first things we know about Barnabas from the Acts of the Apostles is that he sold a field and laid the proceeds at the feet of the apostles. He was the first director of philanthropy for the church.

Barnabas was also an ambassador for those in need. As we heard in today's reading, there was a famine in Judea, and Barnabas was compassionate. He was an ambassador and an agent for bringing relief to those in need. And from many places the people sent their offering through Barnabas and through Saul.

And in this General Synod we've celebrated the 50th anniversary of Primate's World Relief and Development Fund; the official relief and development agency of the Anglican Church of Canada throughout the world. Yes, in faith we've joined hands and we continue to inspire hope for those in need throughout the world in the spirit of Barnabas.

Now Barnabas was not unfamiliar with the councils of the church. He'd probably find an interesting spot in this synod. He took his place in the first council of the church. Acts chapter 15 – and what was the issue then? Who is the gospel for? What does this new community look like? Who's included in this new community? The issue was circumcision and the inclusion of the Gentiles.

And as we read in the Acts of the Apostles there was a great debate, and we read the whole assembly kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Saul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles.

I think that the same spirit that presided in that council has come to us because we too wrestled with issues of who we are as a church. How hospitable are we? How welcoming? How inclusive? How pastorally accommodating? How generous? How patient? How respectful in the midst of all our theological diversity? I believe the spirit of God has presided in this synod as we've taken counsel over contentious issues, particularly around the blessing of same-sex unions.

What has happened here? I'll tell you what I think. I think the Holy Spirit has called this church out of a time when we tried to resolve so many contentious issues through resolution, heated debate, fierce confrontation even on the floor of Synod; and subsequent hurt and anger and frustration and discouragement. People should never walk away from a synod feeling that way. So what has the Spirit done? The Spirit has called us into a new space, a new space in which we have robust conversation. We try to speak the truth in love; we try to listen respectfully and together we try to discern the Spirit's leading.

We have emerged from this synod, I believe, more encouraged and more hope filled as people of faith. We've chosen, and it will be subject to much interpretation around the Communion, but we've chosen in this synod not to take legislative action, but rather, as our *Pastoral Statement* puts it—to acknowledge that “we are in a time of ongoing discernment, and it requires of all of us mutual accountability in Jesus Christ.” Our statement says that we acknowledge diverse pastoral practices as dioceses respond to their own missional contexts; that we are not prepared to impose decisions upon one another; decisions with which we cannot live. And we've made a strong commitment to be passionate about walking together.

Do you remember when I gave the Presidential Address and I shared with you something from The report of the pastoral visitors to the House of Bishops, and the quote I lifted from their report to the Archbishop of Canterbury was this, “General Synod 2010 will, indeed, be a watershed, both for the Anglican Church of Canada and for the wider relations within the Anglican Communion. At its worst it could lead to internal anarchy. At its best it could help us to appreciate and practise a properly Christian style of inclusiveness.” And I said last Friday, I pray, of course, for the latter. Today I rejoice with you that in fact that has come about.

Before we voted the other day we sang that beautiful hymn:

Like the murmur of the dove's song,  
like the challenge of her flight,  
like the vigour of the wind's rush,  
like the new flame's eager might:  
come, Holy Spirit, come.

To the members of Christ's body,  
to the branches of the vine,  
to the church in faith as assembled,  
to her midst as gift and sign:  
come, Holy Spirit, come.

With the healing of division,  
with the ceaseless voice of prayer,  
with the power to love and witness,  
with the peace beyond compare:  
come, Holy Spirit, come. (Hymn 635, *Common Praise*)

That's how we prayed. And I have seen in this synod exchanges of peace and love across many theological perspectives. I don't want to exaggerate this, but I think our church has truly been renewed in the Spirit of God. I dare say reborn. Reborn to a new way of living the gospel; speaking with one another, walking together.

And finally Barnabas, it says, was "a good man and full of the Holy Spirit." Wow, wouldn't you like to have that as your epitaph? "A good person and full of the Holy Spirit!" I love the way the collect for his feast day reads – *he sought not his own renown but the well being of the church*. That's my work and it's our work. Not to seek our own renown but the well-being of the church.

And as members of synod we've spent these days together taking counsel for the well-being of our Anglican Church of Canada, its commitment to the gospel, its relationship in full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, its place in the life and witness of the Anglican Communion, its partnership with other churches in the gospel, and its work with people of many faith traditions who passionately are committed to addressing poverty, investing in peace, and caring for this earth.

One of the questions that appeared on the screen in Bible study the other day, which I am going to take away with me was – "Looking at the challenges we are facing as a church in the world, what inspires our righteous indignation and what breaks our hearts and what are we going to do?"

That's a call, isn't it? That's a call to mission. That's a call to be, as our sisters and brothers in the ELCIC church are, to be "a church in mission with and for others."

Barnabas was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and therein my friends is our vocation—to be good people, to walk gently upon this earth, to walk humbly with God and respectfully with one another. It's to have our lives oriented, first, foremost, and last of all, to God. To be grounded and rooted in the love of Christ; and given to all things to be the ambassadors of God's love and justice for all people.

"There were twelve apostles and then some—some others who never belonged to the original companions of Jesus, but who were also called apostles, because they sought to proclaim the gospel."

Barnabas was one of them. He's our man!

In the spirit of Barnabas, in the spirit of his faith and commitment, we now prepare to leave this synod feeling the winds of God, lifting our sails and charting a new course that we pray will be to the Glory of God and the extension of His reign of love. Amen.

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