

Kelly Baetz' induction and collation as an archdeacon
 All Saints, Huntsville
 March 8th, 2020.

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

**“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
 the whole earth is full of his glory.”**

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.” **Isaiah 6:5**

“And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God – or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? Galatians 4:6-9

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. **John 1:1-4**

Kelly's One Duty

We live in a day when clergy and laypeople alike are befuddled about just what a parish priest (let alone an archdeacon!) should be. Should he (or she) be an inspiring preacher, a compassionate counsellor, an exciting educator, a computer and money savvy administrator, a deeply spiritual leader of worship, or a strong visionary CEO? Of course, most parishes would like to have it all! Right?

But I'm here tonight to tell you that there is really only *one* thing that Kelly is called to do among you. She is called, through all that she does here, to tell you the Truth.

It is an ancient, timeless Truth:

- that has its origins in God,
- is recorded for us in Holy Scripture,
- is revealed in our risen Lord Jesus, and
- is brought to life in us by God's Holy Spirit.

This Truth has the power to change lives even your lives, and through you, the life of this broken hurting world. This Truth entails Kelly telling you the truth about three things.

The first is the hardest. She must tell the truth about herself. In our OT reading tonight Isaiah tells how God touched his life, in his case with an amazing and life changing vision. Through this vision Isaiah caught a glimpse of God's holiness; something he would never forget. He then tells of his painful recognition of his own brokenness and uncleanness before God.....but finally of an amazing gift.....Isaiah's guilt and sin taken away, and God's seal and calling placed on his life.

A really great parish priest is one who knows and shares how the Truth of God has touched his or her own life. Kelly must be able to be open about her strengths and weaknesses, her gifts and passions, as well as her failings and doubts. She must speak out of her own humanity, so that you can recognize your own. Because when Kelly speaks of those situations that most try her faith, you will find courage to wrestle with doubt and despair yourself. And when she speaks of why she believes with all her heart in our risen Lord, you will find courage to trust and go deeper with God yourself.

In short, a good parish priest must be real. But in doing so she will take a risk, because that kind of truth about oneself is not what the world is used to.

We live in a culture that seeks strong, confident, and above all successful leaders. Movers and shakers, who know how to get things done, and get 'em done right. People with the right connections, and the right skill set. Sometimes this can make clergy feel that to be faithful they have to be perfect. They should never have problems at home. They should never have a down day. They should always have it all together, always have the answer to every question.

Let me say that you are blessed to have Kelly as your priest.

- She is gifted in helping people discover and grow in their own gifts for ministry.
- She has gifts of leadership and a passion for seeing new people come to know Jesus.
- She has a passion for the gospel and for building authentic community.
- She is creative in children's ministry and as a leader of worship.

And Kelly is also a human being. She is a wife and mother. She has known worry, pain and sorrow, and she has known the peace of God that is so often poured out during those times. She will be a caring and wise pastor, and she will make mistakes. She will be your leader and she will be your servant. According to Jesus these two roles are inextricably linked.

Jesus offered a different vision of leadership from that of the world. In terms of the society he lived in, he wasn't particularly well connected. In fact, he insulted considerable numbers of very influential people. He very often hung around with the rejects of society.

He spoke of true leaders being slaves, and demonstrated this by washing feet; a job done only by a servant. Jesus ended up betrayed by one of his own, abandoned by his closest followers, and hanging from a Roman cross. His apparent favourites among his followers were those that messed up, but were able to admit it.

Jesus calls us to be real about who we are. Isaiah cried out, “I am lost – for I am a man of unclean lips – yet my eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts.” So like Isaiah, Kelly must tell you the truth about herself.

Secondly, Kelly must tell the truth about you. For most clergy this is a little easier, but it’s still harder than you might think. That’s because the truth Kelly tells about you will go against what you hear about yourselves in the broader culture.

We live in a culture that tells us our value is determined by our education, our jobs, our connections and our possessions (which of course leaves a lot of people out). But Scripture tells us we have value because we are loved by God (which includes everybody!).

What Kelly will tell you is the same truth found in our epistle reading, in which Paul reminds the Galatians about who they are and what God is calling them to be. You are no longer slaves Paul says, for you are known by God, the Creator of reality itself. Imagine that! Weary slaves, plucked out of the cotton fields and told, “There was an awful mistake....you’re children of the king!” The Spirit of his Son has been sent into your hearts, writes Paul, and you are now an heir....you’ve been written into God’s will. This is the good news Kelly will tell you.

But good news was not *all* that Paul gave the Galatians. In tonight's reading he also gave them a warning. Paul knew who he was writing to --- as a pastor--- just as Kelly will come to know you. The Galatians had the very same tendency that exists among all of us here tonight: the tendency to want to turn our relationship with God into a collection of rules or principles. It's easier that way. We start wanting to separate the sacred from the secular, to reduce our faith to a set of beliefs and religious practices. That's when we start being more concerned about displaying the correct liturgical colour in our churches than we are about sharing God's love with that colleague at work.

God wants something much more from us than a set of religious rules or principles. In Romans 12 Paul says "offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.... this is your spiritual act of worship." That's what worship looks like to God! The Westminster Confession puts it well when it says that the purpose of human life is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. This is the second part of God's truth that Kelly will tell you the truth about yourselves.

But finally, it is Kelly's job to tell you not only the truth about herself, and about you....but, by far most importantly, the truth about God....which brings us to our gospel reading. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. This is at the heart of the Christian understanding of God. God is not some kind of mafia kingpin, to whom you need to pay a little protection money so he'll leave you alone.

Just like a doting parent, God has counted the hairs on your head and knows and loves you more deeply than you can possibly imagine....enough to come and share our human experience. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Out of Jesus, the Living Word, comes the light and life of a new identity and a new way to live. Even though the world doesn't recognize this light, nothing can extinguish it. And to all who believe, God gives the right to become his children.

But how exactly does one come to believe, and then be a follower of Jesus? It is Kelly's job to help you with that and, most importantly, to help you know Jesus; to know what he's like, what he taught, how he lived, what is important to him. In the NT book of Hebrews, the bible calls Jesus "the exact representation of God's being". For Christians, Jesus is God's portrait, as well as the portrait of how to be fully human.

You know when Jesus talked to people, his most common opening statement was "I tell you the truth.....". Truth was and still is very important to Him. In fact He also said this "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus is the truth of God made known to us. He has the power to change lives and to change our world. Don't settle for something less. When He promised that the truth will set you free he wasn't kidding. For Kelly, and for each person who is and will be a part of this parish, and a part of the diocese she will serve as an archdeacon, my prayer is that you will carefully listen for, and boldly speak, the Truth that has the power to set people free.

Amen.