

Matthew 10:34-39

Induction for the Rev. Terry Dirbas at St. John Shaughnessy

January 10, 2022

**Sermon preached by the Venerable Stephanie Shepard, Archdeacon of Granville,
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*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in
your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

I have a confession to make: I am not Lindsay Hills. Lindsay was to have been here tonight preaching but is ill, and I send my love out to her and to all who are unwell and to those caring for them. One of the words I have come to know well in the last two years is “pivot”. As we rise to meet the challenges that this time is throwing at us, we are finding ways to adapt and innovate, even at short notice. But change carries consequences, as is described in a book that may be familiar to some of you: the fifth in the Harry Potter series.

At the beginning of the school year, those returning to Hogwarts are introduced to a new member of staff. Professor Delores Umbridge addresses faculty and students with an illuminating speech about why she has come to teach. At first, she seems to praise adaptive change, “for without progress there will be stagnation and decay.” But then she goes on to warn with the following: “there again, progress for progress’s sake must be discouraged, for our tried and tested traditions often require no tinkering. A balance, then, between old and new, between permanence and change, between tradition and innovation... Let us move forward then, into a new era of openness, effectiveness and accountability, intent on preserving what ought to be preserved, perfecting what needs to be perfected, and pruning wherever we find practices that ought to be prohibited.”

Most of her audience are bored, baffled, or suspicious of her sermon. “I’ll tell you what it means,” said Hermione ominously. “It means the Ministry’s interfering...”. The battle lines are soon drawn. Friends are set against one another through mistrust and misinformation. Only love and loyalty to the truth will bring them through the darkness in their lives.

Change and conflict bring out the worst and the best in us. Today the Anglican Church commemorates William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633 to when he was executed in 1645. In the twelve years he was head of the Church in England, he implemented a vast programme of reform that was met by opposition from many sides. He preached against the “pretended innovations in the Church” that he felt had been brought by the Puritans. This majority party in the Church wanted to purify the practices of believers. They had tried to simplify services in medieval churches by removing stone altars, stripping sanctuaries of decoration, and grouping participants around a forward wooden table to receive communion. I see that here at St. John’s you have hedged your bets. These “low church” measures unfortunately also brought about inconvenience, irreverence, and not a little unpleasantness as people and animals jostled noisily in services.

Laud sought to reverse the changes. He changed the place of consecration back to an altar at the east end of the building. Sanctuaries were fenced in with a rail, where people knelt to receive communion in a line. If he had stopped with rearranging the furniture, perhaps most would have accepted it. But his emphasis on reverence including customs like genuflecting towards the altar and bringing

back candles and vestments and hangings that reminded churchgoers of the Roman Church they had broken away from. As a result, the Puritans considered him just as vile an innovator. He is remembered for his emphasis on the beauty and mystery of worship. But the way he went about his correctives in practice led to his trial, imprisonment in the Tower of London, and eventual beheading.

And so we get, for this most delightful and joyous occasion of the celebration of new ministry, a text from Matthew, chapter 10 verse 34: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword”. William Laud defended his disciplines as being for the good of the Church. They have enriched our tradition. But O Terry: let this be a caution! Even when innovators are asked for, the implementation of the ideas is not always welcomed. Jesus speaks of the cost of discipleship for those who follow his way and do not give in to the majority, even to family ties or loyalty to a party or group. Change carries the seeds of conflict. And conflict can be creative or destructive.

Our Anglican tradition has its share of innovators: people who have developed new methods, introduced changes, and brought about ideas of how to do things differently. From our struggles at the denominational level and the parish level we have learned that how we do something is as important as what we do. Parish leaders, both lay and ordained, are agents that help a community manage and adapt in healthy relationships. We are called to consult widely, to agree on a process for decisions, to inform before we implement, and to assess the results-

intended and unintended- of what we do. Never have we needed gifts for thoughtful innovation together as much as now.

As we rise to the challenge of collaborative and courageous action, we follow Christ's own way. This Church depends on it. Nurturing and growing healthy communities means finding ways to stay in dialogue even when diverse voices threaten to turn us against one another. A sword can be used to either sever ties or to cut through the mistrust and misinformation to get at the heart of the truth. St. John Shaughnessy, in the parish profile shared with you, has been clear about intent:

"We welcome everyone and are enriched by the dynamic tension of differing beliefs. We embrace doubt. Pray hopefully. And celebrate diversity. We practice our faith in our everyday lives. Are strongly committed to social justice. And believe in the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to transform lives."

Terry, this community has invited you to be clergy leader among them. Tonight they commit to work with you as disciples, as innovators, and as agents of gospel change. And we who are witnesses will do all in our power to support this parish in mission. We are all in. Progress for progress sake may well be discouraged, but progress for the sake of the gospel is worth the cost. As Jesus says, "those who lose their life for my sake will find it." Hold each other to this in love and truth. Amen.