

**General Convention closing Eucharist**  
**17 July, 11:30 am**  
***Living Ubuntu: feast day of William White***

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**Presiding Bishop and Primate**

We've heard lots of words these last 11 days. We've used those words to make policy, to claim our missionary heartbeat, to bind ourselves in solidarity with the least, the lost, and the left out. Some of us have even had to eat our words – unexpected things have happened, we've made mistakes, and we may even have misused our words. We have eaten Word, sacramental word becoming flesh in us, that our words might come closer to that original Word.

We keep coming back to where we started, as Eliot put it, we arrive at the place where we started, and know it for the first time.

Jeremiah speaks the word of God: “Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” We are having words again.

Our words have gone to build up and to plant, in compassion for human beings within and beyond this church. Our words have also focused on plucking up and pulling down injustice, destroying and overthrowing systems that oppress, from the union demonstration on Tuesday to resolutions that challenge us about continued racism and discrimination. Words have also reconciled – I've watched to my brother and sister bishops struggle to craft words that would draw others in, rather than shut them out.

The prophet is appointed to speak words to nations and kingdoms, to challenge and critique the enormities of power, and to nourish and encourage the despairing. Jeremiah spoke to a people struggling with leadership, who remembered their centuries old controversy over having kings.

William White did something similar, with a people just as divided over the idea of bishops. In White's case it was the northern Anglicans and the southern ones, and the passion had a lot to do with their fears about monarchical power and its misuse. The Anglican Communion is in a dither like that right now: do we need more centralized authority, or do we need to

honor the gifts and voices of every member of our churches? Our budget decisions at this Convention have challenged us to move from more centrally authorized mission toward more local mission support. Indeed, how do our structures serve God's mission?

We remember William White not just because he presided at the first Convention, but, as the collect says, because of his gifts of "wisdom, patience, and a reconciling temper." Not long ago, the rector of the church in Philadelphia where William White is buried wrote me to say that White isn't "just another DWM clogging up the calendar." DWM, referring to his status in the church triumphant, his family name, among other things, and the gender he shares with the majority of figures on the calendar. But his gift of a reconciling temper is the kind of word I want to leave with you. White modeled the gift of Anglicanism – holding together in tension polarities that some are eager to resolve. He was a master of "both/and" thinking and living. He had the audacity to change his mind – you only have to compare his early writings with his later ones to see how far he moved in his understanding of what this Church might become.

His both/and thinking is the kind of tension that keeps our hearts pumping and mission thriving. It's also the kind of tension that drives some of us crazy – what's more important – justice or mercy? Inclusion or orthodoxy? Ministry grounded in bishops or in baptism? Most of those polarities are false choices. The long view says that if we insist on resolving the tension we'll miss a gift of the spirit, for truth is always larger than one end of the polarity. Tension is where the spirit speaks. Truth has something to do with that ongoing work of the spirit, and it can only breathe in living beings capable of change and growth.

Jesus is prodding Simon Peter into that kind of tension when he asks him if he loves him more than these. Do you love me? Do you really love me? Can I trust that you love me? Then go out there and feed my sheep!

What are the lesser loves, what does Jesus mean when he asks if Peter loves him more than these? Does he mean the other disciples? The fish they've just had for breakfast? The vocation of fishing? Or maybe the whole package? Whatever it is, it has to move into the background if Peter is going to feed and tend the flock. Around here I think it has something to do with how right we think we are. What or who are we more in love with, than Jesus?

The job is to feed the sheep. Nothing else matters a whole lot. And Jesus is clear that it's not just the flock right in front of us. There are other hungry sheep that we don't see every day, which is one reason for many

shepherds. We may all be sheep, but we all also share in the work of shepherds.

How will the work that's been done in this gathering feed the sheep that you see week by week? These resolutions only have life as they're implemented around this Church, in French, in Tagalog, in Vietnamese, in Hmong, Lakota, Spanish or English. Your job is to go home and help this work we've done become food in your own context. At least in part it's a work of interpreting. You will have to bring digestible food, and tell the story of this Convention, in ways that your local sheep and shepherds can understand. That is an act of love. What or whom will you love most in the process? Will you love Jesus more in the telling? What you've learned here about Public Narrative may help your work of feeding your neighborhood sheep.

The food you have to offer has to be digestible and attractive – it needs to be good news, if you're going to tend the sheep around you. Going home with a list of complaints, or full of anger about what you wanted that didn't pass, is only going to generate indigestion. That is not an act of love. Sure, every flock finds a few noxious weeds in the pasture, but healthy sheep learn to how to avoid them. Tending the sheep means leading them to good pasture, and caring that they might grow. What food will you take?

Even more, the work we share is how to let the Word, the sacramental Word we receive here, become sustenance for those we meet – how does Word become hope, how does it fill stomachs as well as hearts, how can it strengthen the heartbeat of this Church?

We're going out there to be that nourishing word. Speak a word of peace and healing to a world desperately in need of it. Become what you eat here today, and feed the world, tend the flock, feed all of God's sheep.