

Tuesday, July 21. 2009

WHY AM I AN EPISCOPALIAN?

There is truth in the saying, "Biography explains Theology". I have told much of the story that follows before, but this retelling is a new attempt to help explain to myself and others where I am at today, Summer 2009, and especially why I am a member of a Church whose Leaders blatantly hold views I consider to be very heretical and unbiblical, now more than ever. I am concerned that I might be discrediting my Testimony among my long time conservative and orthodox friends and confusing them and my former parishioners. This is my Apologia. I was ordained to be a Baptist Pastor and I enjoyed my ministry among the Baptists and still have good friends and memories from those days. But I became interested in the quest for the ideal New Testament Church, and succumbed to the goal of seeking to find one and worship as the first century Christians did. It is a tempting goal, that many have found irresistible through the years- almost like the music of the Sirens that tempted Odysseus on his mythic travels. I learned the futility (and danger) of the search after having gone to a Seminary that was a leader in the Movement to restore the early church and having ministering among them for a few years. We still have friends and good memories from those years, too. Christians in that Movement (once known as Campbellites) are not Reformed Calvinists (although the Campbells, father and son, were ordained Presbyterian Pastors from Scotland. The members of the Restoration Movement prefer to be known simply as non-denominational "Christians"). I did not make an issue of that, but simply preached a core evangelical Gospel. They practiced a mix of Elder rule and congregationalism. In doctrine, they were Arminian, but my concern was primarily with Ecclesiology. We observed the Lord's Supper every week in our corporate worship, as Believers did in the NT Church, and connected it and Baptism with Salvation more directly than Baptists do. That emphasis has stayed with me over the years and, in retrospect, prepared me to eventually join the Anglican/Episcopal Church with its emphasis on Eucharistic Worship and Sacraments. (This development would boggle the mind of my old friends in the Restoration Movement and absolutely confound my Seminary professors). Our local church at that time was in a college town. I came to realize that local churches of any kind are not reaching the minds and hearts of college students. In fact, churches of any kind were not doing much of anything to engage Culture for Christ or the people who would become change makers in it. Churches were, in effect, ineffectual as agents of the Kingdom. Increasingly, that was the work I was drawn into. We began an effort to minister to students at DePauw University with a bookstore we started with that purpose. Within a couple of years, the Lord very clearly led us to move from Indiana to have a Ministry of evangelism, apologetics and counseling with college students in Amherst, MA. I reaffirmed my Reformed Calvinist Faith and Worldview and my wife and I had an effective 1:1 ministry among students and some faculty of the famous 5 Colleges in the Amherst-Northampton area through the two bookstores we owned and managed there. That remains a "mountain top time" in our lives and we still have good friends from that period which is now some 35 years ago. I missed preaching and my wife took on the management of our stores and I went back into the Pastorate, this time in a local old mainline Congregational Church which had had a serious split. A member who was a friend recommended me. The appeal of this move was another old idea- instead of planting a new church, we would work to change an established one from within. I again preached a core evangelical message and many came to faith (and most of them moved on to a local evangelical church) Eventually the longtime liberal members had enough of me. I resigned, very much discouraged and broken. I decided I would never attempt to change a liberal church from within again. We were befriended by two Episcopal Priests (one was to become a Bishop) in the days after I resigned and for a while we worshiped in the local Episcopal Church. God used the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, those friendships and liturgical Worship to heal and renew me. This is a major reason why I am Episcopalian today. Our evangelical friends seemed to have deserted us completely, although the Elders of our former church in Indiana called to ask if I would consider returning there. I declined and we moved back to Amherst and began a short-lived "Community" with students in a house we rented just off campus. I studied and wrote and taught classes. The owner eventually sold the house and we had to move. While there we held Sunday morning Worship Services using various Anglican/Episcopal resources. (The Episcopal Church or TEC is one of 38 National Churches or Provinces which have an historical and spiritual connection with the Church of England and its Archbishop of Canterbury, hence they are "Anglican". They share a common Heritage including the liturgical way they Worship, which is governed by a Book of Common Prayer. Until 1979, they all shared the same Doctrinal Standards. Together they form an association called the Anglican Communion and it is the third largest body of Christians in the world.) The best place we could find to live next was in an old tough neighborhood of Springfield, MA. I had begun working for the State Department of Retardation while in Amherst and we became very active in an Episcopal parish a few blocks from our new home. We visited evangelical churches but found a home in none of them. We settled in as Anglican/Episcopalians. I had renewed my Reformed Calvinist Faith. We knew the Episcopal Church had the reputation for being a dying liberal mainline denomination, but that 1928 Prayer Book and the History and Heritage of Anglicanism which it shared was rooted in the Reformed Calvinist Faith. Some of the writers most influential in my studies have been Reformed Anglicans such as J.I. Packer and Leon Morris. I was accepted by some of the area Priests as a colleague, and began preaching and teaching and having workshops in several parishes;

but when I applied to enter the track toward Priesthood, I was flat out rejected by the Commission on Ministry under the influence of the Chairperson who had distain for evangelicals). My wife and I continued to be active as laypeople and actually had a good ministry among Episcopalians, but when an opportunity came to be the Pastor of a rural community church whose former Pastor, I was told, was an evangelical, I went for it. Again, a friend who was a member recommended me. Again I preached the core evangelical Gospel and many came to faith. Again, the long time members became unhappy and literally fired me (the Chairman of the Board called to inform me of that the day after my father passed away). That was 10 years after I had resigned from the Congregational church. We continued with a home Bible study and within a few months tried to begin a new church in the same town at the request of the folks in the Study. We lasted there about a year, leaving again over a personality (?) conflict with the key family. They hired someone else. I became the supply Preacher for an Evangelical Free Church in CT. That went well for a few months, but I was unable to find a permanent or full-time Pastorate anywhere. It was on my heart to preach. I heard of another EFC in Vermont that was looking for a Pastor. A friend who was a member there recommended me and we were accepted and moved there for what was a 5 year Pastorate. I set aside my Anglicanism and Calvinism because EFC churches are neither. I preached the same core Gospel as I always had before and people came to faith and there was growth and a new building; but again, long time members became unhappy with me and a stalemate ended with my resignation. That was 6 years ago. I interviewed at other EFC churches but that process reaffirmed that I was not to be a Pastor in a typical evangelical church again. We returned to Springfield and to a local Episcopal Church in a nearby town which we knew was evangelical, even though the Diocese and national Church are not. I do not and never have bought into the Liberalism of TEC and I strongly disagree with the national Church, the Denomination, on many important subjects. But there have always been many Clergy (including one of our sons) and lay members who know and faithful serve Christ and His Word within the national Church in Dicoeses and Parishes around the Nation. They are simply not in power and the unorthodox have captured the Leadership of the Church, now in 2009, more than ever and I realize many of the current memebrship are not evangelical Chrsitians. The situation is very dire. Is it hopeless? Probably, although as long as there is "local option", freedom for local clergy to faithfully follow Christ and preach His Word there is reason to remain for the immediate future. Will that freedom disappear under the pressure of the current authorities to make everyone conform to their views? Most probably, over time, but I am 71. Many of the orthodox Clergy have been leaving the Church, now that alternative Anglican Churches have begun to emerge on the American scene. There are none in this area. The current Priest-Pastor in the parish where we have worshiped over the years is evangelical, but most of the evangelical members have left. Should we join the exodus? Shoud we stay and support him? The appeal, as always, has been the Eucharistic and Liturgical Worship and we can not find that and an evangelical Pastor anywhere else in this area. I absolutely do not want to return to contemporary or emergent evangelical church worship. I definitely prefer the formal, orderly and theologically sound Anglican/Episcopal worship. As to the Reformed Faith, my knowledge of it has deepened and become more clear and strong over the years, I appreciate it, and see the the need for its promotion, more than ever. I certainly do not want to fosake the Reformed Calvinist Faith again for the "core evangelical Gospel". Actually, the latter is morphing into something that is nothing like the Gospel I preached over the years. It is becoming the Gospel of love, relationships and social action. If the Episcopal Church has its heresies, so do the evangelical churches. They are on a very slippery slope into serious error and away from the Truth once and for all delivered to the Saints. So where does this leave us? As a sheaf of wheat among tares, as a light in darkness, as a voice in a wilderness? Well that is a bit I over dramatic, but something like that. At least I can minister in some ways within our local Parish for the time being, but I do not know for how long. I have no hope or expectations of changing the Episcopal Church as such. I will not try. The Rubicon has been crossed. The Radical Liberals have come and have conquered and are committed to complete conquest. It is a tragedy. To me it is a lost cause. However, Anglicanism and the world-wide Anglican Communion is growing and doing very well without TEC and shall continue to do so. I look forward to seeing some Anglican Parishes established in this area some day. Meanwhile, the old need to reach college age young people and students with Truth is more urgent than ever. What to do? Promote the Reformed Faith (and its worldview, known as Neocalvinism) and continue enjoying Eucharistic, liturgical worship. And Preach and teach as opportunities come, but remain "retired" from Pastoral Ministry. By the grace of God and hopefully- to His Glory!

Posted by Cal in Personal Journal at 17:55