

Proper 11, Year B
Ephesians 2: 1-11
July 19, 2009

Trinity Episcopal Church
Sonoma, CA

Crossing a Great Divide:
A Sermon Preached by the Rev. Susan Allison-Hatch

This was quite a week for the Episcopal Church. People on both sides of the question that so divides our church and our communion struggled with how faithfully to resolve the dilemmas that divide us. They listened to one another speak truths that were sometimes painful to hear; they took time to reflect prayerfully on what they heard, and in the end, followed what they believed was the Gospel call to full inclusion of all of God's children in the ministry of the church. What makes me proud is not so much the result—though I'm pleased with it—but rather the tenor of the debate.

After all was said and done, the Bishop of Texas, who voted against the resolution, commented,

“The House of Bishops carried on a deep debate of listening ears and open hearts. Bishop Hines once called this the "exquisite pain of being a bishop" -- living and praying through times of great division with your brother and sister bishops. This was very hard work today. I thought that the House deliberated and conversed well, prayerfully, and mindful of those who were not like minded in the room.”¹

Similarly, on the other side of the divide, Bishop Gene Robinson said,

“...while I find profound joy in the vote for inclusion, I also continue to feel quiet and humble in the face of it, knowing the distress it also causes in other faithful people, in the Episcopal Church and in the Anglican Communion, who are my brothers and sisters in Christ.”²

That's what makes me so proud today—that spirit of reconciliation both in the Bishop of Texas and in Bishop Robinson that makes room for the other even when they come from very different places and see two widely different truths.

I think that was what the Church in Ephesus was struggling with—finding a way to bridge the deep divisions between Gentile and Jew and living together as a community of disciples doing their best to follow Jesus. In their time there was no bigger gap than the gap between Jews and Gentiles. It wasn't easy to build that church in Ephesus. It wasn't easy to bring Jews and Gentiles together. Like the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion, those early Christians must have had their moments. Yet they worked together and they stayed in conversation letting God's grace work in their lives. Letting God shape them into a community of reconciliation. Becoming a model for we who follow in their wake.

You and I we live in a world of division and difference—in our schools, our workplaces, our town and even in our families. Think of the circles in which you move—how many of them are intentional about reaching across divisions, listening their way to a deeper unity, acknowledging and respecting differences while holding one another in affection and love?

The Church, at its best, is a leader for reconciliation in the world, a place for overcoming divisions. Yes, differences in race, class, gender, sexual identity, politics and even churchmanship are there—but they don't have to be barriers to living in unity in Christ. Sometimes we stumble, sometimes we focus on our differences, sometimes we fall prey to division, but in the long run, we keep turning back to God's great welcome table. We work at reconciliation.

This is why I love the Church; this is what brought me back to church in the first place. The church is a place where at our best we keep returning to the table—the table where people on both sides of the great divides of our day gather together, eat the bread, drink the wine, and become one body in a fractured world. A people forgiven, healed and sent out to do Christ's work in the world.

¹The Rt. Rev. Andrew Doyle, "The House Passes DO-25," [The Ninth Bishop of Texas Blog](#).

²The Rt. Rev. V. Gene Robinson, "Reporting In," [Canterbury Tales From the Fringe Blog](#).