

With the Eyes of Our Hearts Enlightened

Introduction to Reflections on the 2020 Diocese of West Texas Theme

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The introduction I was asked to provide for this Bible study wasn't so much about the verse from Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians that is serving as our diocesan theme for this year. And it wasn't to give background on the passage—a beautiful prayer—in which this phrase is embedded. Nor was the request to offer an overview of the theology, context and themes of the entire letter.

The question was, “Why did you pick *this* to be our theme?”

The theme is from Ephesians 1:18, and it definitely helps to place it within the verses that surround it: *“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead...”* (vv. 16-20)

Why this one? God works in myriad and wondrous ways, and how I came to choose this particular verse resulted from several things converging on it. First, I wanted a theme that spoke of vision, of looking out from our present circumstances to a God-promised future. Council began on February 20—get it? 2/20/2020. How could we *not* go with vision and seeing? More significantly, I was growing increasingly troubled by the incivility, the anger and the divisiveness in American life, and I wanted a theme that would call us to look higher and more deeply for the truth and beauty that's all around us. I wanted to recall us to our higher calling as Jesus' followers to practice mercy, kindness, compassion, reconciliation, and more—all of which requires that we pay attention and watch expectantly for the presence of God, AND that we pay attention to the person right in front of us. (All of this thinking and

planning was taking place last summer, so long before COVID, the re-emergence of racial injustice, and more hurricanes than we can name.)

To counteract the harsh and harmful accusations and counter-accusations that pass for political rhetoric, I wanted to call us as the Body of Christ, to be a voice for the truth of the Gospel. But in our day (as in every age, perhaps), it's hard to get a hearing. It seems to me that now is a time when all those who work to "tell the truth, but tell it slant" (Emily Dickinson)—artists, musicians, poets, comedians—may have a better chance to make a difference for good (and for God) than those who try to reason and argue with the unreasonable.

Long story short, I took this verse and about five others to a Council planning meeting with diocesan staff. They were pretty evenly divided between this verse and another one. So I took the two "finalists" to Camp Capers and set them before the senior high campers, and asked, "Which do you like more?" They liked this one, and so did I, and that settled it.

As 2020 has unfolded (or careened out of control), the durability of this gentle theme has been amazing. For me, its effect has been almost like a church bell, calling us to stop and turn our attention to the Lord and giver of life. To see with the eyes of our hearts enlightened helps us find our way through the relentless noise and clutter, living with hope and trusting that the Spirit is leading us to a new day.