

# Walking on Water

*Proper 14A: Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33*

*August 10, 2008 ~ All Saints Church, Pasadena ~ Susan Russell*

Well, I'm back from Lambeth.

Lambeth Conference 2008 – the every-ten-year gathering of Anglican bishops – is, as they say, “in the books.” (And the response to that versicle is “Thanks be to God!”) Louise and I are grateful to be back home in general and back at All Saints in specific – thankful for all your prayers and good wishes – emails and blog comments. We truly felt that we were surrounded by a cloud of All Saints witnesses during our three-week witness in Canterbury. And by the end of it, as I noted in the article I wrote from “across the pond” for this week’s Saints Alive, I was *very* ready to click my ruby slippers together because there really IS “no place like home.”

So what exactly *happened* at Lambeth? Like the old joke says, I’ve got good news ... and I’ve got bad news.

Before we left for England, I told a PBS producer shooting a pre-Lambeth report here at All Saints that the headline I hoped we’d write when it was all over was **“The Coup Has Failed: Anglicans Continue to Muddle Along.”** And for what it’s worth, the good news is I got my headline.

For in spite of the dire predictions of a great *coup d’état* in the works that would vote the American and Canadian churches off the Anglican Island and might *just* throw the Archbishop of Canterbury out with the bathwater for good measure, the breaking news out of Canterbury was that there was no breaking news out of Canterbury.

Yes, sadly, a handful of the 38 Anglican provinces chose to boycott the Lambeth Conference, and 20% of the bishops chose to stay home rather than engage with those with whom they disagree. But for those who did show up – 670 of them, by one count – rather than an outbreak of schism they experienced an outbreak of civility.

The interactions between the bishops over their two-week conference were marked by generosity and by a holy curiosity and genuine interest in learning from each other about mission and ministry in the various parts of the global communion.

Building on those relationships – one-on-one, diocese by diocese, year by year – will continue to build up the bonds of affection that make up the fabric of this global communion of which is our Anglican family of faith.

And I am both proud of and grateful for the work our Lambeth Witness of LGBT Anglicans offered toward building those relationships. Here's how I answered the "why are you going to Lambeth" question *before* we left for England:

*Because it is critical that the gay and lesbian faithful, who have seen their lives and vocations reduced to bargaining chips in a decade-long game of Anglican politics, speak out together and give voice to the hope and the faith their witness to the Anglican Communion represents. And so we are going to witness to the Good News of God in Christ Jesus made present in our lives, in our vocations and in our relationships.*

Although it didn't occur to me at the time I could have just referred questioners to today's reading from Romans: *How are they to hear without someone to proclaim? And how are they to proclaim unless they are sent?*

It was in response to that sense of being called to proclaim – of being sent to witness – that our courageous, faithful, *tireless* corps of LGBT witnesses (and straight allies!) got to work. Our numbers included Anglicans from Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Mexico, Brazil and Uganda working with American, Canadian and UK activists – all part of an "Inclusive Communion Network: Proclaiming God's Justice, Living God's Love."

And of course there was the Bishop of New Hampshire – a sitting, diocesan bishop denied participation in the official Lambeth Conference meetings – but willing to be sent, nevertheless, to proclaim the Good News of God in Christ Jesus, who – he keeps reminding us all – "loves us beyond our wildest imaginings."

It's leap of faith work, this stuff ... because at the end of the day there are no measurable goals, no quantifiable outcomes, no ... what do they call them? ... "metrics" to judge our work a success or a failure. We came. We prayed. We witnessed. And we may never know if hearts were touched or minds were changed.

Except for this one ... a bishop from North India who sent an email of thanks to conference organizers, who passed it on to us. It's from Bishop P. K. Samantaroy from Punjab, India:

*“Coming from a conservative back-ground I was not even prepared to listen to any person who supported the gay and lesbian people. However, [I have] changed my opinion. I have become aware of the pain and agony people have bear because of our attitude towards each other.*

*Further, I am convinced that despite their different and often opposite positions all are committed to live and grow within the Anglican family. The binding force in a family is love. I have decided not to be hasty in judging the gay and the lesbians. I wish to learn more about their life and problems. I have also decided to regularly pray for them. I wish to encourage the other members of the Anglican Communion to do the same.”*

One bishop. One email. One inch of the planet growing greener. There WAS good news.

There was also bad news. In the 11th hour -- during his final Presidential Address and at the Press Conference following -- +Rowan Williams managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of the victory of a conference what was on the verge of finding a new way forward in faith for those committed to walk together in spite of their differences.

Like Peter, who the gospel writer Matthew tells us, started walking on the water toward Jesus and only began to sink when overcome by doubt and fear, Rowan Williams – after two weeks of a miraculous “walking on water” Lambeth Conference – sank like a stone in the last two hours.

Williams had the chance last week in Canterbury to keep walking on water ... to step out in faith and try something that some say is impossible: to find a way forward as a communion of faith refusing to be divided by the differences that challenge it. But by pushing his preference that the American and Canadian churches abide by the moratoria on blessings of same sex unions and the consecration of any more openly gay bishops, he undid in a two-hour span a good percentage of the good work that had been accomplished over the two-week conference.

For at the end of the day – and against all odds -- the mind of the bishops gathered was to live with the differences they had spent all that time discussing rather than let them be exploited into the divisions the schismatics have been insisting they must be. They offered a great whiff of hope to the end of the sex wars and a vision for the beginning of a new way of being communion together.

And instead of embracing that nothing-less-than-a-miracle new way of being – instead of walking on the water toward Jesus – Williams retreated into fear and doubt and threw down a gauntlet to the Americans and Canadians – challenging them to make a “Sophie’s Choice” between the full inclusion of their provinces in the Anglican Communion or the full inclusion of their LGBT baptized in the Body of Christ.

And he should be ashamed of himself.

The sacrifice that will hold the Anglican Communion together is not the sacrifice of the gay and lesbian baptized but the sacrifice of a false unity based in dishonesty. It is nothing less than rank hypocrisy that the Archbishop of Canterbury is willing to lay at the feet of Canadian and American Anglicans the blame for divisions in the Communion when the only difference between what's happening in our churches and in his is that we're telling the truth about it.

Scripture tells us what happened to the foolish man who built his house upon the sand. It's time for the Archbishop of Canterbury to act like the wise man he is and build the future of the Anglican Communion on the solid rock of honest differences and not on the shifting sands of global Anglican politics. Jesus promised us that "the truth will set you free." The Communion deserves nothing less than the truth -- and so does the Gospel.

There is some good news in this part of the bad news.

+Marc Andrus, Bishop of California immediately said his diocese would not abide by the moratorium on same-sex blessings and our own Bishop Jon Bruno quickly went on record with, “I can only say that inclusion is a reality in our diocese and will continue to be. For people who think that this is going to lead us to disenfranchise any gay or lesbian person, they are sadly mistaken.”

For at the end of the day, there is an ontological difference between feeling excluded because you're disagreed with and being excluded because of who you are. Brother and sister Anglicans walking away from the table because they've been disagreed with is a painful thing. The church walking away from the gay and lesbian baptized is a sinful thing.

There was a cartoon in THE CHURCH TIMES. It was set in an automobile show room and the banner announced a new model for 2008: the Anglican Moritoria.

Beneath the picture of the car – sitting on blocks, rather than tires, the cartoon said: *It's much safer than the other models. Doesn't go forward and doesn't reverse; just stays where it is.*

And now we're back to the good news. The good news is that muddling along isn't good enough. The good news is "Not as bad as 1998 does not the Kingdom make." The good news is we are not going to settle for the mission and ministry of this church – of this communion – of this Gospel being stuck on blocks in some show room because of a failure of nerve by those who've been charged with getting it in gear and moving forward in faith.

The good news is that next year when the Episcopal Church meets in its General Convention, we will be calling on it to say – once and for all -- that gay and lesbian Anglicans are not for sale as bargaining chips in this game of global church politics – that the sacrifice of their lives and vocations in this church is too high a price to pay for institutional unity – and that we are done having our mission and ministry held hostage to the dysfunction of our Big Fat Anglican Family.

We're ready to walk on water. We are ready to step out in faith in response to the one who says "Come" and to believe that miracles can happen. We're ready to walk on water knowing that even if the strong winds blow and the naysayers nay we belong to the One who will catch us if we fall as we move forward in faith into God's future.

And that, my brothers and sisters, is the good news!