

I would like to begin this afternoon by expressing gratitude to our convention hosts – the people of the Southwestern Deanery, including Good Shepherd Granbury, St Luke’s Stephenville, St Mary’s Hamilton, and the Episcopal Church in Parker County. I want to especially recognize the Dean, Norm Snyder, the Sub-dean, Joe Christopher, and the Secretary-Treasurer, Marti Farley. Let’s show our gratitude to the Southwestern Deanery.

I would like, also, to recognize the people who planned and led our opening worship: the chair for worship, Kevin Johnson, the music coordinator, John Doshier, and today’s guest preacher, Doug Travis.

And, I would like to introduce and publicly thank my talented and dedicated staff for whom I have great respect and affection: Treasurer’s Assistant, Adriana Cline; Administrative Assistant, Michele King; Ministry Support and Communications Officer, Deacon Tracie Middleton; Communications Director, Katie Sherrod; Communications Assistant, Susan Kleinwhecter; Canon to the Ordinary, Canon Janet Waggoner, and my assisting bishops, Bishop Sam Hulsey and Bishop Rayford High.

By now, most of you are aware that one of our assisting bishops has had a change in status. For the past year, Rayford has been telling us that he was “going to the river. It’s time to go to the river. I’ve got some environmental studies to do at the river. There are some trout needing to be caught at the river.” I’m now highly suspicious that “the river” is a euphemism. (I should have thought of that one in High School.)

Well, I don't know "who caught who," or if they caught each other, but seemingly out of the blue, Rayford announced that he was getting married. And on Saturday, August 12th, at St Paul's in Waco, Texas, Bishop Rayford High and Canon Ann Normand got married. And we are thrilled for both of you. And in the "how does this affect us?" department, they are living in Fort Worth. Let's welcome and congratulate Ann and Rayford.

I would like to take a moment to welcome and recognize some people. Doug Travis, today's preacher and one of tomorrow's workshop presenters, grew up in Tulia – in the Texas Panhandle. Raised in a family of Presbyterian clergy, Doug is the outlier Episcopalian. He has served congregations in the Dioceses of Dallas and Texas, as the Dean of the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, and as Canon Theologian in the Diocese of the Rio Grande. Please welcome, Doug.

We have guests from the Diocese of Northwest Texas: the President of the Standing Committee, Jane Wolf; Financial Manager, Anna Mora; Diocesan Administrator, Elizabeth Thames; and Canon to the Ordinary, Mike Ehmer. And finally, my partner in dual citizenship, my wife, Kathy Mayer.

Every convention is a transition. At this time I would like to show gratitude to all those who have served in various capacities, and are rotating off or resigning from their respective positions. These include: from Constitution and Canons, John Back, Fred Barber, and Chuck Weidler; from the Disciplinary Board, Becky Snell and Janet Nocher; as University of the South Trustee, Andrew Wright; as Trustee for the Endowment for the Episcopate, Floyd McKneely; from the Executive Council, at-large, Barbara Evans-Chowning, Victor Mashburn, and Bob Gross; Executive Council by Deanery, Scot McComas, David Stanley, Lyn

Minor, Mark Whitley, and Louis Eichenberger; from the Standing Committee, Amy Haynie and Joel Walker; and from the Corporation, Jim Hazel. Would those of you that I just named please stand? Let's show our gratitude.

Jim Hazel's resignation calls to mind the dedication and service to our diocese from all the members of the Corporation. Much of their work is not very visible to the day-to-day life of the diocese, so with the help of Katie Sherrod, I would like to recognize their wisdom, knowledge, and their strong sense of responsibility, as we make visible today each member of the Corporation.

Bob Bass. In the many profiles of Bob Bass in the business and mainstream media, some observations appear again and again. He's very intelligent. He's almost always the best informed person in the room, and he encourages collaboration. In fact, his and Anne's generous gift to Duke University was used to establish Bass Connections, a program designed to encourage interdisciplinary study and collaboration between the university's students and faculty. These traits are certainly in evidence in his work on the Corporation. Bob is dedicated, faithful, and persistent. His dry sense of humor, his keen observations, and the depth and breadth of his knowledge and interests serve this diocese extremely well.

Cherie Shipp. Cherie brought her forensic CPA skills, her work ethic, and her commitment to thorough and accurate accounting, both of numbers and people, to her work on the Corporation, where she serves as treasurer. Cherie, also, is a member of the Board of Visitors of Brite Divinity School; she has served on the diocesan Finance Committee and the Executive Council. She is a skilled chef, a gift she and her husband shared with Trinity some years back when they created Feasting with the Saints – literal feasts to celebrate saint's days and the cuisine of

the region the saints come from. It was a delicious way to learn more about the saints on the calendar. We are grateful to Cherie for her work on the Corporation.

John Stanley. John has a very long history as a priest in the diocese. He was rector at Trinity for more than twenty years and provided a steady hand for the parish through many years of diocesan conflict until he retired in 1999. When the diocese reorganized in 2009, he was another of the retired priests who volunteered to serve. He supplied at St Luke's in the Meadow. As in all jobs he undertakes, he is invested in his responsibilities to the Corporation which is evidenced by his faithful attendance and attention to details of business. He is pastoral in his approach to solving problems and generous of spirit when considering the effects of the events of 2008 on all involved.

Trace Worrell. To state the obvious, Trace is devoted to All Saints. I doubt there is any lay position that he has not held. Liturgically, he is committed to the choir, but he does not limit his involvement to the music program. Vestry, Senior Warden, Search Committees, fund raising campaigns – he has done it all conscientiously and well. He is as generous with his time and talent as he is with his treasure. His deep commitment to the Episcopal Church makes him a diligent worker for the diocese on the Corporation.

Elinor Normand is not a member of the Corporation, but her faithful service as their clerk must be acknowledged. Her many years of service as a lay leader at Trinity and in the diocese, including volunteering as webmaster for the reorganized diocese, and serving as president of the Standing Committee, certainly place her among the most informed and qualified clerks in the history of

such jobs. Her assiduous, accurate note-taking, her attention to detail, and her sense of humor are icing on the cake. Thank you, Elinor.

Now, President Jim Hazel. Financial advisor, besotted father and grandfather, bike rider extraordinaire, and priest, Jim was born two days after Christmas, because like any good Episcopalian, he had to wait until Advent was over and the birth of Jesus had been acknowledged before making an appearance. After serving as president of the Corporation since the reorganization of the diocese in 2009 until the present day, Jim decided not to allow himself to be nominated for another five-year term on the Corporation. (I can't imagine why.)

If we listed all his contributions to the diocese over the past decades, we would be here all day. But here are a few. In the wake of the reorganization, Jim not only headed the Corporation, he stepped up to serve the Episcopalians of Christ the King when they were locked out of their building. His love of God combined with his calm demeanor, wry humor, and pastoral skill made him invaluable to the congregation during an exciting but also uncertain time.

On the Corporation his leadership skills, his ability to see all sides, and to cut through to the heart of the matter has made the challenging and important work of the Corporation appear effortless to the rest of the diocese. Let's show our gratitude to Jim Hazel.

We have a number of events to highlight from the past year, beginning with the visit from our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, along with his travel team of Michael Hunn, Sharon Jones, and Tara Holley.

The theme for the event was taken from a hymn written in 1866, “I Love to Tell the Story,” and it was and is evident that Bishop Curry loves to tell the story of Jesus and his love. During the three days, the Presiding Bishop made a trip to Parker County so that he could bless and commission our church planting team and their priest, Hunter Ruffin, followed by a wonderful lunch in Parker County at Bishop Hulseley’s farmhouse. He made trips to see ministries we support in action, including the 4Saints Food Pantry and Refugee Services of Texas. He spent a morning at St Christopher’s in order to meet and visit with gathered members of the diocese. He was the keynote speaker at the Colonial Country Club to support our New Life Fund to raise matching funds for Episcopal Church grants. And he concluded the event by preaching at the closing Festival Eucharist at University Christian Church.

I can tell you that he and his team were impressed with what they experienced: your hospitality, your sacrificial giving, and your focus on mission, your sense of purpose, and your love for The Episcopal Church. It was a memorable event for all of us.

The New Life Fund event was co-chaired by Jim Hazel and John Banks – and Bishop Hulseley and Bishop High served as honorary chairs. The goal was to raise \$200,000 to match funds granted by the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church; we raised a little over \$201,000. The large majority of the funds raised will support congregations by supporting clergy, either through moving part-time clergy to full-time, church plants, or curacy programs in partnership with congregations.

Every three years the Episcopal Church holds an event called the Episcopal Youth Event. This year the event was held in Oklahoma, and attended by over 1000 youth from around the country and beyond. I have said before that this is the best thing the Episcopal Church does together: fellowship with youth from around the world; lively worship including sermons from the Presiding Bishop; significant workshops; and timely themes.

This year's theme, "Pathways to Peace," included a trip to the Oklahoma City Memorial Museum, along with presentations and speeches from victims, survivors, and first responders. Hearing those stories was nothing less than profound, and very emotionally moving. I'm proud that our tradition gives young people such an opportunity. This year, Andrew Wright and his sponsors took seven teenagers to the Episcopal Youth Event. I was privileged to attend, as well. As I said after my first trip to EYE – 3 years ago – "I'm never missing this again." If you are an adult and want to be a sponsor in three years, you need to recruit four teenagers.

And today we celebrate the Episcopal Church of Wise County, as they seek to do three things. First, they seek to be recognized as a "mission" of the diocese. Second, by virtue of that status, they seek to be included as an "assessment paying congregation." And third, they seek to change their name to the Episcopal Church of the Resurrection. Tony Hiatt, their priest, tells us that the current congregation is the third incarnation of an Episcopal church in Decatur, Texas, in this building going back to the time of Bishop Garrett. In between times, it has been a mattress factory and a wedding chapel. We've seen resurrection in Wise County, and Tony will have an opportunity to speak to us later.

Our convention theme, “Raise your eyes, and look at the fields,” is supported today by our convention workshops, “Mystics, Activists, and Sowers.” Today’s preacher, Doug Travis, leads a workshop entitled “A Community of Mystics.” In an age when people identify as “spiritual, but not religious,” Doug asks the question, “What if our call is not so much to guarantee the future of the institutional church as to rediscover our tradition’s own deepest spiritual practices for both our own growth and as an offering to the larger world of seekers?”

Joshua Houston and Scott Atnip of Texas Impact will make a presentation entitled “Activism for People Who Don’t Think of Themselves as Activists,” exploring how civic participation and advocacy can improve the lives of our neighbors.

Already, we have some people improving the lives of their neighbors through advocacy in more ways than I am aware. I would like to mention three of which I am aware. More than half of the congregations were represented in the Tarrant County March for “Love not Hate,” on a rainy afternoon. We have Episcopalians in Arlington involved in the Inclusive Faith Coalition. And two Episcopalians (Terri Mossige and Katie Sherrod) have been appointed to Fort Worth’s “Task Force on Race and Culture,” and many more are participating in forums.

And Hunter Ruffin, our own church planter for Parker County, will lead a workshop entitled “Become Sowers,” using the Parable of the Sower to explore the realities of planting seeds for growth, and partnering with each other and others for the good of the community and for the growth of the church.

I think we will see elements of all three of these themes as we explore the passage from the fourth chapter of John's Gospel, when Jesus says to his followers: "Raise your eyes, and look at the fields."

As the story goes, Jesus is traveling through Samaria on his way to Galilee. Jews and Samaritans are not friends, but the fastest way to Galilee is through Samaria. It's around noon, Jesus sends his followers to go buy food, and tired from the journey Jesus sits by a well.

A Samaritan woman comes to draw water, and Jesus says to her, "Give me a drink." She says, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jesus crosses several boundaries by talking to a Samaritan woman who has been married five times.) Jesus replies that he can give her "living water," and that she will never thirst again. He remarks that he knows that she has had five husbands; she recognizes from that remark that he is a prophet, and ultimately realizes that he is the Messiah.

About that time, the disciples show up with food, and they are astonished that Jesus is talking with this woman at all. Upon their arrival, she departs to go tell her neighbors about Jesus. Her Samaritan neighbors believe her testimony, and come to see Jesus. Before they arrive, Jesus turns to his followers and says: "Raise your eyes, and look at the fields." He says the fields are "ripe for harvest" – meaning God's salvation is available now, and even for Samaritans.

Many Samaritans believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony; many more believed because of his word, saying, "We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

I want to begin today by looking at the phrase, “raise your eyes.” One of the early Church theologians (named Origen) tells us that “lift up your eyes” occurs in many places in Scripture when the divine Word admonishes us to exalt and lift up our thoughts, and elevate our insight. We could think of this as an epiphany, a moment when something which was true all along is made known – an “aha moment,” a sudden awareness.

But another word – perhaps a surprising word – comes to mind, as I think of Origen’s understanding of “raise your eyes.” To exalt and lift up our thoughts, to elevate our insights, is what it means to repent.

In the culture we tend to think of the word “repent” as feeling bad for doing bad things, and in the Church we tend to think that it means to “turn around” – we are going the wrong way, so we need to turn around. And both these understandings can be helpful. But the word “repent” in the Greek language means something more.

When we gather to celebrate the Holy Eucharist on Sunday mornings, or as we pray the Office during the week, we confess that we have not loved God “with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent.”

It’s true that we are sorry, and we acknowledge the need to turn around. But, in the Greek the word means “to go beyond the mind,” or “to go into the larger mind.” Jesus tells parables and stories that invite us to go beyond the way we typically think, to go into the larger mind.

And one way of going beyond our minds and into the larger mind – one way of lifting our thoughts, one way of “raising our eyes” – is to re-think how we understand that Confession that “we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.”

When Jesus commands us to “love our neighbor as our self,” he does not say to “love your neighbor AS MUCH AS yourself.” Cynthia Bourgeault points out: “It’s just love your neighbor AS your self – as a continuation of your very own being.” To love our neighbor as our self is to see us as connected, as at-one. That’s what it would mean to go beyond the mind, to go into the larger mind, to repent.

That’s how the Apostle Paul writes about the Church – as living members of the Body of Christ. When one member of the Body rejoices, we all rejoice. When one member suffers, we all suffer. That’s how mystics see the whole human family. It’s like when the hammer hits the thumb. The rest of the body doesn’t say, “We are sorry about that thumb; the rest of us are okay” There is some sense of urgency to alleviate the pain in that thumb.

On our clear days, we do love our neighbor AS our self. We have that capacity I would suggest we’ve seen it recently as people have responded to devastating hurricanes in Texas and Florida. We’ve seen instances of humankind at our best – story after story of people responding with sacrificial giving: monetary giving; taking boats to the coast to help with the rescue of stranded, hungry, thirsty survivors; driving big trucks down there which could navigate flood waters, as they were loaded with goods.

That's raising our eyes. That's loving our neighbors AS ourselves. Such moments give us hope in the capacity of love, maybe especially right now, during this period of history of such division, and anger, and manifestations of hate.

When Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself," he said that in a particular context. The people of Israel were living in desperate times politically – something they interpreted as a spiritual failing on their part.

Their own laxity in regards to the spiritual life and their unfaithfulness to God led to the Roman occupation of their land. They lost their freedom. They were taxed heavily. They functioned as the service-industry for the Romans. This was not the imagined Promised Land. And they interpreted their situation as being a result of their unfaithfulness, so it was a spiritual crisis.

Four familiar Jewish religious groups react to this spiritual crisis in four different ways: Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, and Pharisees.

The Sadducees are the only ones disinterested in change. The Sadducees have some degree of wealth and status. They are willing to live with the status quo. Change would be risky for them. A revolution would make things worse. Satisfied people don't tend to seek change, even if it's needed.

The Essenes: John the Baptist was an Essene. Essenes want change, but they don't see it happening within the culture, which they see as decadent and beyond hope. They drop out of society to seek holiness of life for themselves.

The Zealots: Judas was a Zealot. They also want change, but they've lost patience with peaceful methods. While not what we would call terrorists, they are inclined to sporadic acts of resistance.

And then the Pharisees. Unlike the Sadducees, they want change. Unlike the Essenes, they are not dropping out. Unlike the Zealots, they will use peaceful methods. The Pharisees will have a role within both religion and society. They will strive to revitalize the faith. They will strive to be instruments of renewal. And they will do that by following strictly the Mosaic Law. The Pharisees will strive to restore the Jews to their proper place through strict adherence to the Law of Moses. That's how they will effect change.

It's likely that Jesus is sympathetic to Pharisees – as he wants change, too, and he knows the law well. And evidently Jesus is intriguing to the Pharisees. But he is seen as being very lax on the law. After all, he heals someone on the Sabbath, and he hangs out with tax collectors and sinners.

So they send one of their lawyers to test him regarding the law: “Which commandment in the law is the greatest?” And Jesus, using Mosaic Law, says: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your mind. ... You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

To those who want to effect change, to those who want a revolution, to those who want transformation – for that matter, to those who want to drop out, and to those who want to keep the status quo – Jesus says, “Love. Love God, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

When we “raise our eyes, and look at the fields,” we can see that our own context is nothing less than a spiritual crisis. We are not living in the Promised Land, so to speak. And as a culture, we are Sadducees who are satisfied with the status quo, and wonder “what’s the fuss?”; and we are Essenes who see society as hopeless, and drop out, maybe by simply avoiding the news; and we are Zealots who have given up on peaceful methods; and we are Pharisees (both conservatives and liberals) who value our precious fundamentals over valuing people. And what Jesus replied to the lawyer and the religious groups 2000 years ago, he says to us today: “Love!” Proclaim and embody love!

One Friday afternoon I drove from Lubbock to Granbury for a Saturday morning meeting. It’s a fairly long drive and I encountered some weather, and I arrived hungry and ready to relax. I checked in, dumped my bag, went to the hotel restaurant, and took a seat in the common area, often referenced as the bar.

A few minutes later, a young woman sat down about three seats over. (Don’t worry; this is not a confession. She was not from Samaria, and I’m not Jesus. And I didn’t ask her to get me a drink.) Everyone exchanged pleasantries. She was conversant; her husband had been in a local hospital, and they were about to return to their home. It was a matter of time before she asked the usual question. All clergy are familiar with this question: “What do you do?”

I have a fairly standard answer that is understood in this culture: “I am a pastor.” Half the time, that’s the end of the conversation. The other half it’s followed by some variation of “So, where do you pastor?” or “Which church?” Or “What denomination?” I reply, “The Episcopal Church.”

You never know where that's going to lead, but in this particular situation there was not an Episcopal church anywhere near her rural home on a ranch in the Panhandle. And she said, "I'm not familiar with it; tell me about it."

Now, I've known for a long time, some wrong answers to that question. The "number one" wrong answer is that back in the 16th century there was a king named Henry VIII, and he wanted a divorce, and the Pope wouldn't allow it, and so the Church in England split from the Catholics, and we have our roots in that.

And that's the wrong approach for a lot of reasons, one reason being because – if we want to be picky – our story actually begins with someone named Abraham, and secondly because it might not be the moment for a history lesson – maybe not even the moment for "via media" or even "Scripture, Reason, and Tradition."

So, I thought I would try something, and trying to avoid our insider religious jargon, I borrowed from our Presiding Bishop, and said, "We believe it's all about love. And if it's not about love, it's not about God. Everything Jesus says and does tells us about God's love."

And she had never heard that before. It very much resonated with what she truly believed, and didn't know she had permission to believe, but she had never heard that before. That's not the story people are hearing about Christianity, partly because it's not the story many highly visible and vocal Christian leaders tell.

Jesus says to us, "Raise your eyes, and look at the fields." People thirst for the living water of underserved forgiveness, and unmerited grace, and unconditional love.

And we proclaim and embody that message, not because we are trying to grow our churches so we can continue to operate as usual, and not because we are trying to reverse the trend of numerical decline in Western Civilization. Certainly, I would like to grow the Church and believe we are called to grow the Church, but that can't be the chief motive for the proclamation of the Good News of God's love. We proclaim and embody love, because the knowledge of God's love changes hearts, changes lives, and changes this world.

Jesus says to his followers, "Raise your eyes, and look at the fields." Samaritans are seeking living water. Samaritans. The woman at the well is as surprised as anybody could be when Jesus says, "Give me a drink." She knows the rules. The disciples, themselves, are astonished when they see Jesus talking with the Samaritan woman, as he disregards conventional boundaries.

In the eyes of the disciples, she has three strikes against her. First, and obviously, she is a woman. Strike one. Second, she's a Samaritan. Strike two. Third, she has been married five times. Strike three. The disciples would say, "Three strikes and you're out," but Jesus says, "Raise your eyes, and look at the fields."

Who is our neighbor? Who are we called to love? There are no boundaries. Not race. Not gender. Not religion. Not nationality. Not sexual orientation. Not political party. No boundaries. Love God. Love your neighbor AS your self.

One Saturday in August, this nation witnessed one more manifestation of our increasing level of division, anger, and hate in Charlottesville, Virginia. It was a day of violence and death.

All people of “good will” are appalled by the events of that day. We condemn the obvious bigotry and hatred, and as baptized people we know we are called to stand against it, and called to work to change it.

But the work we are called to do runs deeper than standing against obvious expressions of hatred, bigotry, and violence. The work of racial reconciliation and the work toward racial justice is deep work. As a society we need to open our eyes to the ways certain systems oppress and exploit. We need epiphanies, “aha” moments, not only about symbols of racism, but also systems of racism.

Those of us who are white need some epiphanies about our privilege. For example, I am not like the Samaritan woman. There are no strikes against me. To continue with the baseball metaphor, as a white male who is straight, I am born on third base. I cannot help where I am born, and I make no apologies for where I am born, but I did not hit a triple. We need to “raise our eyes,” to “elevate our insights,” to “go into the larger mind,” to “repent,” to look inside our own hearts.

The work of racial reconciliation is deep work, and it’s going to take love. Our Presiding Bishop says, “We are called to make disciples who will change this world by the power of God’s love.” How we change the world means everything, as for Christians, the ends do not justify the means, especially if the means are simply expressions of raw power. Bishop Curry is specific: we change the world by the power of God’s love – through the power of love, not the love of power.

I would like to make an appeal to all of us gathered here today to believe in the power of God’s love; to trust that God’s love has the power to change hearts, change lives, and change this world; to have faith in God’s love to reconcile all

people to God, to one another, and to our truest, best selves; and to believe that the love of God can change anybody.

The horrific images of what happened in Charlottesville, Virginia may challenge our faith in the power of God's love to change those who have been hardened by hate. So, I would like to tell a story which I heard on NPR on the Monday following that tragic Saturday. I know I needed to hear this story of hope.

It was an interview with a young man who once led a hate-group called the Chicago Area Skinheads. His name is Christian Picciolini, and he now runs an organization called "Life after Hate." "Life after Hate" helps people leave hate groups, particularly white supremacy groups, and hundreds of lives have been changed since its founding six years ago.

In the interview Picciolini says, "I think ultimately people become extremists not necessarily because of the ideology. ... I believe that people become radicalized, or extremist, because they are looking for three fundamental human needs: identity, community, and a sense of purpose."

Those are three good things, by the way; three things found in baptism: Identity, Community, and Purpose. This is "love and desire gone wrong" the classic Anglican understanding of sin. This is "love and desire gone wrong," as they seek these human needs in hate groups.

Picciolini describes these young people as marginalized, dis-enfranchised people with not a lot to believe in, with not a lot of hope – tending to search for black and white answers.

So, Picciolini was asked, “What do you tell them?” meaning, “How do you help bring about these conversions?” He said, “I listen more than I speak.” He listens for what he calls “potholes” – abuse in their life, addiction, abandonment, and so forth, and then he arranges for the appropriate treatment.

And then after working on the person, he challenges their ideology. And he does that by immersing them in situations which challenge their narrative – their story of others. If a person is anti-Semitic and hates Jews, he pairs them with a holocaust survivor. If a person has been attacking mosques, he pairs them with an Imam. If a person is persecuting gays, he pairs them with someone who is gay.

He immerses them in a situation that challenges their narrative, and opens their eyes to see a human being. When it works, they have an “aha moment” – an epiphany – and they cannot justify their prejudice any longer. And all of this is most transformative, he says, “when they receive compassion from the people they least deserve it from when they least deserve it.” That’s the most transformative process, and it’s the one experienced by Christian Picciolini himself.

Receiving compassion and love from someone “we least deserve it from when we least deserve it” will change lives. It has for 2000 years. From the cross Jesus says, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” From the cross the love of God is revealed in underserved forgiveness, unmerited grace, and unconditional love. It can change anybody. It can change this world.

“Raise your eyes, and look at the fields.” Earlier this year, during the Presiding Bishop’s visit, I had the opportunity to speak, and I remarked that since the re-

organization of this diocese, you have had your eyes on the “fields” so to speak. I said, “You made choices over 8 years ago to be mission focused. You could have entrenched yourselves. You could have held steady until the judges ruled.”

“But from ‘day one’ you chose living over survival, and love over fear. For example, you paid your full asking to the Episcopal Church before you paid another bill. You budgeted your fair share to support such institutions as seminaries. Congregations with little in the way of financial resources looked beyond themselves to their respective neighborhoods. Deacons took seriously their vow to “interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world.”

You looked outward at the fields, when you could have been tempted to turn inward toward survival, and you are to be admired and respected. And I am grateful for the privilege of serving you, as together we “raise our eyes, and look at the fields.”