

ἄρτι ἔσται ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ

The Mustard Seed.

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Trust: An Important Thing

Text by the Rev'd Dr. Paul Shore
Honourary Assistant, St. Matthew's Cathedral, Brandon



The email wasn't completely out of the blue, but all the same, it was a surprise. People who know me realize that they always run the risk of being backed into a corner and forced to listen to how the legendary name of one of the Magi means "King of Light" in Hebrew. So with a reputation like that, one gets some wild requests to explain what this or that old word might mean.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. First I need to go back, about 1500 years. In those days the coast of North Africa, which today we associate with Arabic Muslim culture, was part of Western Christendom. The cities of that region were graced with noble churches and many great leaders of the Church called the place home. This all ended when Islam advanced across North Africa from

the east in the eighth century A. D. The region we now call Algeria received a new language, religion, and set of social customs in those years, which are still the mainstays of its society today.

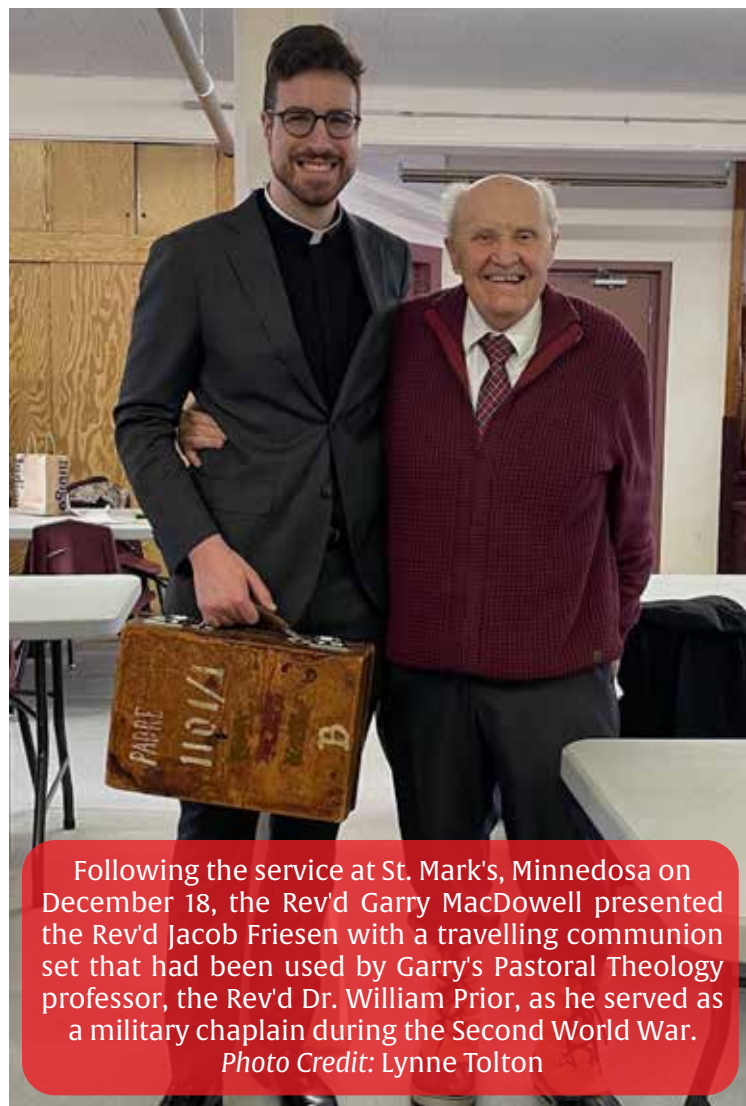
Fast forward to 2020. That's when I received an invitation to travel to Adrar, a city in the mountainous highlands of Algeria, to give some lectures on early Christian reactions to the Qur'an. Of course the pandemic was just starting to sweep the planet, and the project was immediately put on hold. By late 2022, we were back on track, and with luck, by the time you read this, I'll have been to Adrar and back.

But about that email... My Algerian colleague, who had tirelessly worked the bureaucracy to enable this North American non-Muslim to come to his university to talk about a potentially very hot-button topic, had a request. Another professor at his university-- a woman, which would turn out to be an important fact in this tale, had a question about the Qur'an. Specifically, a question about a particular passage in the Qur'an, which discusses the relationship of men to women. This could be much hotter than a hot-button, especially with a Christian cleric being the one commenting!

Let me be clear. I am not some famous expert on

the Qur'an and don't want to come across as such. The point of the tale is trust. People I have never met, followers of a different religion that is often in conflict with my own, trusted a stranger to give an honest opinion about a verse from their holy book. So of course I gulped, said yes and set to work on the verse in question. It turns out that, as is often the case, there was a "hard line" way of reading the verse, and a legitimately "more open" way to do so. I've never sweated so much over a short translation in my life! I tried to reciprocate their trust, trusting that they would accept what I came up with. Wonderfully, my Algerian colleagues seemed happy with the result, and I look forward to meeting the professor who had the original question.

Which brings this story to Lent. Lent is not merely -- or even, mostly-- about giving things up. The word "Lent" is a cousin to "length" and suggests lengthening, not cutting back. During Lent, as Ashley Weece writes, we have the opportunity to invite God to lengthen our trust, lengthen our selflessness, and lengthen our faith in Him. The opportunities to do this so often come, not from a list we've made of things to give up, but from the outside world, calling us to take a chance, go out on a limb, and to trust a little more.



Following the service at St. Mark's, Minnedosa on December 18, the Rev'd Garry MacDowell presented the Rev'd Jacob Friesen with a travelling communion set that had been used by Garry's Pastoral Theology professor, the Rev'd Dr. William Prior, as he served as a military chaplain during the Second World War.
Photo Credit: Lynne Tolton



Neepawa United Anglican Shared Ministry
Photo Credit: the Rev'd Chad McCharles OSBCn



St. Mary's, Brandon
Photo Credit: Murray Cook



St. John's, Bethany
Photo Credit: the Rev'd Chad McCharles OSBCn

Throughout this issue of the Mustard Seed, you'll see submitted photos of churches around the Diocese decorated for Christmas. We hope you enjoy seeing our churches decorated for the commemoration of the birth of our Lord!

A Word From Our Bishop

Broken relationships, wounded pride, fights with those we call friends or family are one of the ways we get into the habit of avoiding one another. You know the feeling, the anxiety in the pit of the stomach at the thought of seeing someone after you have had “words” with them. So rather than face the broken relationship, or the wounded pride or even the regret of having been stubborn in an argument we avoid having to face folks with whom we have quarrelled. Then time does its work, and the next time you see one another, there are averted eyes, embarrassed looks and a hasty retreat. This is a near universal experience either as the recipient of the awkward looks or the one who avoids. It would seem to be a reflection of the human condition.

It is not just in our relationships that we face this...in my experience as a University Chaplain I saw another living example of the same thing many times. In University courses, students would get behind in their work and then begin to avoid the class because they did not want to be confronted by the professor, or alternatively, they were ashamed of having fallen behind. Having avoided class, they fall further behind and then it all spirals into avoiding the professor in the hallway and misery as the hole just gets deeper. Finally, a deadline looms: usually a term



The Rt. Rev'd William G. Cliff
Bishop of Brandon

paper or an exam.

The crisis would often end with a distraught student wondering how to remove themselves from the trouble. The solution was always the same: “You must go talk to your professor”. This is the one piece of advice they do not want to hear, because it is the one thing they had been avoiding but then the student goes and the relationship is re-established.

What often follows is an redemption and an epiphany. The professor works extra to help a student and the student re-commits to the work. Having faced failure, and their shame in failing they can then succeed. When the meeting happens soon enough, the course (or the term) is saved. The one that must change is the student. No more fear, no more avoidance, for these are what put the student at risk in the first place.

We are marking a shorter Epiphany this year. The relationship between the light of Epiphany and the reflection, repentance and action of Lent is not far from us now. If Epiphany is about light, and the revelation of that light on earth, then Lent is the shift between the arrival of that light and the discovery of what that light has revealed to us as it shines in our lives. We have to face what the light has uncovered and revealed to us and there is no avoiding it.

The larger question is this: Are we willing to deal with both the revelation of Christ in our midst and the fruits of that revelation? The Christmas heart filled with gratitude and love must be gently turned to the examination of our failings in light of God’s great love for us. We must contend with what the light reveals: our faults, our sins, our willingness to avoid and our desire to deceive ourselves into thinking we have nothing of which to repent. But Christ still stands there, his glorious light shining in our lives and calling us back to the better version of ourselves that Lent is meant to make us.

The first thing that must change is our avoidance of reflection and repentance. Only when we face the troubles we have created will the situation of ourselves and the church be fully revealed. In the same way that an undergraduate must face the fear avoidance and make the change, we

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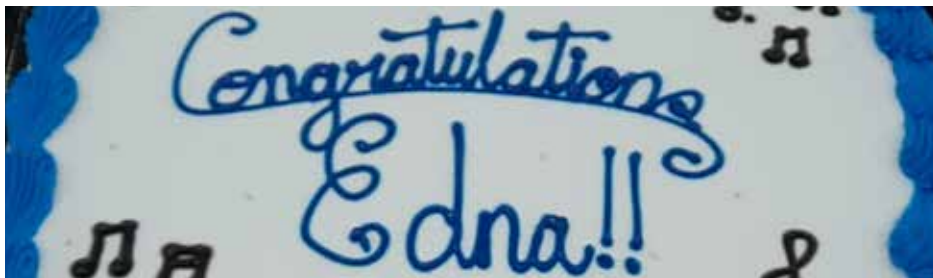
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The Mustard Seed is circulated ten times a year (from September to June), as a section of the Anglican Journal, to all supporting households in the Diocese of Brandon.

Contributions to the expense of the paper are normally requested each March but donations are accepted anytime. Changes of address can be made through your parish or directly with the Anglican Journal. Opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Bishop or of the editor.

Deadline for submissions: the first of the month. *Please note:* All submissions are subject to editing for clarity, timeliness, appropriateness, or length. Submit writing to the Editor in Microsoft Word file format or in the body of an email. Photographs must be large, high resolution jpg files. Please ensure you have permission from parents or guardians of all minors who have their photos or names published in The Mustard Seed. If including a photo, please send a name of who took the photo along with it, so the Editor can give proper credit!



On December 18, Edna Knock was made the Music Director Emerita at St. Matthew's Cathedral, Brandon. In this photo, Edna poses with the Dean of Brandon, David Naylor (the current Director of Music) and the Bishop.



Edna cuts the cake at the reception following the service.

must look to our own houses and see the Christ, whose light has been shining all along. That light can and will draw us back to the loving God who loved us first and already knows that which we fear and want to avoid. Still, the light shines, and still we are called back from darkness, into his glorious light. Give thanks for the light of Christ in your life for it reveals the remaining spiritual dirt that we need to sweep up. Give thanks and don't avoid your work!



News from the Pews

CHRIST CHURCH, THE PAS as submitted by the Rev'd Jann Brooks

The Anglican Church Women of Christ Church, The Pas, held their annual Christmas Tea and Bake Sale on Saturday, December 3. After a break due to COVID-19, it was great to have so many people attend and enjoy the event. A crew of seventeen made the event happen with donations of baking and crafts from the congregation. Many hands make light work.



A young attendee picks the winning ticket for the door prize. Anne Ducharme looks on while Alice Ginter holds the draw box and Shirley Mitchell is selling items from the Craft Table. Photo Credit: Cheryl Antonio



The Church Hall full of community members enjoying the tea. Photo Credit: the Rev'd Jann Brooks

ST. PETER AND ST. JAMES, FLIN FLON with text and photos submitted by Shelley Andres

During Advent 2022, St. Peter and St. James', Flin Flon joined with their siblings in Christ at First United Lutheran Church and Northminster Memorial United Church, in worship together at the three different churches in the community. On the first Sunday of Advent, the three congregations worshipped together at Northminster United Church, and on the second Sunday in Advent, they worshipped together at First United Lutheran Church. On the third Sunday in Advent, they joined in worship at St. Peter and St. James', with the Ven. Dr. Kara Mandryk presiding at a service of Holy Communion. The congregations enjoyed worshipping together in the different church buildings and are exploring the possibility of worshipping together again during the season of Lent.



The congregation joins together for a time of fellowship following the service on Advent 3.



The Ven. Dr. Kara Mandryk preaches a sermon.



Archdeacon Kara lights the Advent wreath with some of the children in attendance.

Anglican Fellowship of Prayer Upcoming Events

February 20 at noon: Inspiration to Prayer, Books and Other Supports
This gathering will be an opportunity to hear from you, about those books on prayer and practices that have been meaningful to you!

March 20 at noon: Archbishop Fred Hiltz on St. Columba
The Most Rev'd Fred Hiltz, sometime Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, will be joining us to speak about St Columba, an Irish abbot and missionary evangelist who founded the important abbey on Iona, which became a dominant religious and political institution in the region for centuries.

For more information, check out our website at anglicanprayer.org.

Do Not Be Afraid — To Care, Help and Love

Text by the Very Rev'd Don Bernhardt TSSF
Dean of Brandon & Rector, St. Matthew's Cathedral, Brandon

Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in the Brandon Sun on December 24, 2022. While we are a few months out from Christmas, it might be helpful to us to reflect on these things as we end the Season after the Epiphany and begin another journey through Lent.

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.'"

— Luke 2:10-11

"Do not be afraid." If you read scripture, you'll find that expression is used a lot. There's debate about exactly how many times it's used, but really, that's irrelevant. "Do not be afraid" is always said when God shows up, or God is about to do something, or God has a message for us. The main point is, over and over again, God tells us that we should not be afraid. Personally, I think that's good advice because if we spend any time watching the news on TV or reading a newspaper, it can be really hard not to be afraid.

We're told over and over that the world is scary. From COVID-19 and other illnesses leading to overcrowding in our hospitals, the war in Ukraine, political unrest in various places and economic uncertainty, our news is full of reasons that might give one reason to be afraid. Sometimes, being afraid is a completely normal reaction. So why then, does God, over and over, tell us "Do not be afraid"?

Maybe the issue with fear is that, over time, it can overwhelm us and make us lose hope. And that's bad because hope is the engine that drives us forward. Hope is the thing that keeps us going when things

are not going well, that little bit of light we can see in the midst of our darkness. Fear can freeze us solid but even a little hope can thaw the heart!

There was fear at the time of the birth of Jesus. Imagine for a moment being far from home and family and about to give birth. And there's no one to help, no safe place to stay. Fear, worry, doubt, these would all be reasonable. Yet in the midst of that, the Christ child is born. God made flesh to dwell among us. I can imagine a fearful Joseph and Mary looking down at this little baby and wondering "now what?" only to have some shepherds come running up to tell them about the angels that had just appeared to them with a message of joy about that little baby they were holding. And the first words of the angels to the shepherds? "Do not be afraid" (Luke 2:10). Those words were not just for them, they were for Mary and Joseph, and all of us, too.

God knew we can be a fearful people, but he had a plan for that. A baby in a manger. A baby Jesus who would grow and learn and then, when the time was right, teach us many things, but the most important of these things is what God's love for us looks like. And he would call us to share that love, to love others, especially those who are hurting. To be able to look at someone who is in pain, be it physical, emotional or spiritual and say, "Don't be afraid, you're not alone."

The call of Christmas is to push away the fear, both ours and others', and replace it with a message of hope. To bring light into someone's darkness.

Christmas can be a season of peace, joy, and love. I

pray it is for you. Sadly though, there will be those among us gripped by fear. Christmas can be a difficult time of loneliness and despair.

There will be those among us who will be suffering through that right now and all the twinkling lights in the world won't fix it. But you know what might help? A hug might, or a call might, or an invite for a meal might, or a cup of coffee and a chat might. We can be that "angel" that shows up, lights that candle and says "Don't be afraid."

Because, as we all know at our core, Christmas is not about the things, it's about the people we love. It's about relationship. May each of us, this Christmas, remember that we are called to be people of hope and people of relationship, to God and to each other.

Do not be afraid — to care, to help, and above all, to love.



From the Archives:
Bev Cochran puts cranberry sauce on the turkey sandwiches offered by St. Matthew's Cathedral for Christmas Day 2021.



St. Matthew's Cathedral



St. John's, Reston

Christ Church, Melita



On December 18, St. Mary's, Virden held its' annual all-ages Christmas pageant, where all the members of the congregation participated.

The Sisters of St. John the Divine The Companions Program (September 2023 - June 2024), offered in a residential format and online

The residential Companions program is an immersive opportunity to experience a contemporary monastic community rooted in the Benedictine tradition. It is open to women aged 21 and up regardless of Christian denomination. Companions live, work, and pray alongside the sisters, learning from them but also sharing each companion's own gifts with the sisters and their ministries.

The online Companions program is an opportunity to become "monastics in the world," living a Benedictine rhythm of prayer, work, study, and recreation. Online Companions learn to develop practices that support and nurture their spiritual life from the comfort of their homes. They meet regularly for classes and discussion groups, and commit to times of personal prayer at home. They share in book studies, participate in online worship and screen films relevant to spiritual growth and self-understanding. Online Companions also develop spiritual disciplines that follow the liturgical year.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT THEIR WEBSITE AT [HTTP://WWW.SSJD.CA](http://www.ssjd.ca).

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