

I would like to begin this morning by expressing my gratitude to the good people of St Matthew's Pampa for your gracious hospitality – led by your rector, Linda Kelly, and your Convention Planning Chair, Gary Niccum. It is a great occasion for the diocese to spend some quality time in Pampa – especially meeting in the MK Brown Center, named after a devoted Episcopalian and community leader; the first Senior Warden of this congregation. The last time Episcopalians met in the MK Brown center was in April of 1973 (the first big event this brand new center hosted), and the guest speaker was the Presiding Bishop, John Hines.

We are grateful to meet here again, as the diocese sees firsthand what we know already – that the people of St Matthew's are gracious, and faithful, and talented, and fun. Their nave is stunningly beautiful, and the music (thanks to Rick Land, and Russ Tapp, and the combined choirs, and the guest harpist, Cathy Clewett) is glorious.

As many of you know, St Matthew's is the "home parish" to a couple of distinguished guests today. Both were influenced and inspired by their rector, Sam Hulsey, and they went to seminary. In fact, they were seminarians when the diocese met here in 1973, and according to the minutes, they were here that day. Both have served this diocese and beyond with distinction.

Fr Bill Nix, who is here with his wife, Puddin, (and technically is not a guest) officiated at last night's service of Evensong. Bill served within the diocese at St John's Odessa, as Canon to the Ordinary, at St Stephen's Lubbock, St Andrew's Amarillo, and as Panhandle Missioner. He has a long resume of exercising leadership in and through the various ministries of Episcopal Church. Welcome back, Bill and Puddin.

Charlie Cook, today's guest speaker, graduated from THE Seminary and came to Lubbock to serve as curate at St Christopher's. Eventually he left the diocese, serving in North Carolina and St Louis before returning to the seminary to serve as professor of Pastoral Theology. Charlie has continued his relationship with the diocese over the decades, serving as consultant, retreat leader, and counselor to countless clergy. Every new seminary graduate knew how to dial "1-800-CHARLIE." Welcome back, Charlie.

I would like to take a moment to thank my office staff, but before I do that, I want to re-introduce our new Canon to the Ordinary, Mike Ehmer. I met Mike when I came to the Church of the Heavenly Rest in 1994, while Mike was serving in the Air Force. We have been friends ever since. A few months ago, our Diocesan Treasurer, Carrol Holley, approached me about the possibility of calling Mike to his previous position in this diocese. Carrol said he could find the money, and when a treasurer says that I figure it's serious. I let three weeks pass, and then I said to Carrol, "Show me that money." Welcome back, Mike and Sue-Ann.

For the past six years this diocese has operated without a Canon to the Ordinary with several people picking up the slack – namely my staff, along with Carrol. I would like to express my gratitude to Carolyn Hearn, Nancy Igo, Anna Mora, and Carrol Holley for your personal sacrifice and your dedication to the mission of this diocese, and I would like everyone here to join me.

Now I would like to thank and recognize all of those who have rotated off of various committees, councils, commissions, and boards.

From the Standing Committee: Jo Roberts Mann of St Andrew's Amarillo and Mike Ryan of Good Shepherd San Angelo.

From the Executive Council: Peggy Valentine of St Mark's Abilene, Debra Burnett of St Luke's Levelland, Mark Lang of St Matthew's Pampa, and Barbara Kirk-Norris of St Mary's Big Spring.

From the Board of Trustees: Paul Goebel of St Paul's Lubbock.

From the Disciplinary Board: Dennis Bosley of St Stephen's Sweetwater and Anthony Garcia of St Paul's Lubbock.

From the Commission on Ministry: John Wolf of St Christopher's Lubbock, Jim Haney of St Paul's Lubbock, and the Chair of the Commission on Ministry, Kelly Schneider-Conkling, who has returned with Allan to their home diocese of West Texas.

I want to recognize three people in particular today. There is no exact parallel organization in our diocesan structure to a congregation's vestry or bishop's

committee. But it has been my very fortunate experience that the President of the Standing Committee has functioned much like the Senior Warden or Bishop's Warden of a congregation. Jo Mann has followed Leon Swift and Betty Gilmore as one who has served as a friend and confidant to me, and has exercised leadership in this diocese with grace, wisdom, faith, and joy. Thank you, Jo.

Next. The diocese has been very well served by one who has led congregations in workshops, visioning, and congregational development. She has been instrumental in the formation of those studying for the bi-vocational priesthood. Within months of my role traveling the diocese, I could tell where Claire had been. And now Claire has heard the call to enter the process toward priesthood. (I think she was the last to hear it, as the typical response to this news is, "What took so long?") Before Claire enters THE Seminary in Austin, I would like to say thank you to Claire Cowden.

Finally. There has been no greater champion for the Bishop Quarterman Conference Center (now doing business as Quarterman Ranch) than Cliff Craig. In 2003 Cliff and I were asked to co-chair the governing board of Quarterman, and for the next decade we have witnessed in Cliff someone who has given sacrificially of his time, talent, and treasure. Cliff Craig is compassionate, faithful, persistent, and fearless. He believes what he writes for his nomination to the Standing Committee, that "we can accomplish far more than we can envision or hope for by the grace, empowerment, and love of God." He never gives up – and he's not giving up now – but after ten years as the board chair, it's time to do something new. Let's show our gratitude to Cliff Craig.

Three years ago, 18 people who served in elected leadership positions in this diocese assembled over a six month period to discern the vision, core values, and immediate priorities for the Episcopal Church in Northwest Texas. I won't revisit all of the results now, but out of that process emerged a 3 year plan with a mission priority of strengthening our congregations.

Specific steps were taken towards that end, including the following. We re-allocated resources, reducing the apportionment from 21% to 17% so that congregations could better compensate their clergy, pay support staff and youth directors, and raise their profile in their respective communities. We contracted Claire Cowden and others to do congregational development with vestries and bishop's committees. We invested in a process toward the ordination of bi-vocational priests, in order to better serve smaller congregations.

We were able to take these steps by making a couple of key decisions for a three year period. First, we set the level of our diocesan giving to the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society at 10%, rather than the now 19% asking. Second, we agreed to draw from endowments additional funds (far beyond the spend rate) in order to support the mission. I'll say more about that later.

Other initiatives which emerged from the process as immediate priorities include ministries beyond the diocese, such as our Outreach Camps (Promise Camp and Happy Camp), as well as our new companion relationship with the Diocese of the Dominican Republic. The DR has welcomed mission trips from campus ministries, congregations, and seminarians.

Strengthening campus ministry at Texas Tech was made a priority. Canterbury is growing numerically and in depth under the leadership of their chaplain, Pat Russell. In the meantime, thanks to Bill and Pat Russell, seeds have been planted to grow the endowment so that one day the diocese can endow the chaplaincy. A campaign lies on the horizon. Red Raiders may have a particular interest in supporting this ministry, but everyone will be allowed to participate.

Finally, a discernment task force including non-Episcopalian civic leaders in Amarillo was established to re-imagine our ministry at Quarterman Ranch. Over the past two years the task force – led by Mary Emeny – has made some significant recommendations.

In discernment with other Amarillo non-profits and foundations, it has been determined that our Outreach Camps – specifically Promise Camp (the camp for the children of incarcerated parents) – is the ministry for which our immediate culture has the greatest need or demand. This is the ministry we offer which is unique in our area, which is the most needed, and which has gained the most attention from area foundations.

At the recommendation of the task force, we have taken steps toward making Promise Camp an independent “501c3” to attract support for this ministry. It is believed that such support will be significant. These outreach camps, led by Todd Baxley and Carole Wolf, fulfill the claim of Quarterman Ranch which states: “Lives Change Here.”

In the meantime, Quarterman Ranch continues to serve the youth of our diocese with youth events during the year, as well as our summer camps. Renee and Jim Haney deserve our recognition, as they have immersed themselves into the lives of our youth. One young woman and one young man who grew up attending camp – and later serving as camp counselors – will have their marriage blessed by Father Jim this December. Lives do change here.

As always, Quarterman Ranch continues to host other diocesan events such as gathering of the ECW and Clergy Conference, for example. Every Quarterman ministry I’ve mentioned today is made possible through the hospitality and sacrificial ministry of our Quarterman Ranch director, Jamie Goldston. Thank you, Jamie.

So, beginning with this convention, we have one year left on the so-called “three year plan,” which means, also, one year left with this particular allocation of diocesan resources – this budget. Given that vision should drive a budget, we will, once again, gather diocesan leadership to do that prayerful discernment during the next year. I expect to appoint a task force before the end of this year.

About a month ago I was watching a speaker on the internet program called TED Talks. If you're not familiar with TED Talks, it's a global set of conferences formed to disseminate "ideas worth spreading."

The idea worth spreading which I bring to our attention is a simple idea popularized by the speaker, Simon Sinek, called the Golden Circle. The Golden Circle has an outer ring, a middle ring, and an inner circle. The outer ring says "WHAT." The middle says "HOW." The inner says, "WHY."

Every organization – every person – knows WHAT they do. They make computers. They play baseball. They provide health care. Some, even many, know HOW they do it.

A few, according to the speaker, know WHY. If you're operating a business, making a profit is not WHY you do it; making a profit is a result. A few know WHY, and the exceptional, memorable organizations and people know WHY. They start in the center of the circle and move from the inside out. They answer WHY first. They start with WHY.

And the speaker gives a couple of compelling examples. The now famous Wright Brothers were in pursuit of achieving powered man flight, but they were not alone.

Samuel Langley wanted to be the first to fly, and he had the recipe for success. The War Department had contributed \$50,000 to create this flying machine, so he had money. He personally had a high profile; he held a seat at Harvard and the New York Times was following his progress. He, and everyone on his team, had an education; he hired the best minds money could buy.

The Wright's had no money; they funded this project by selling their bicycle shop. They had no publicity before success, and not a single person on their team had a college education. But the Wrights were driven by a cause, a purpose beyond themselves. The Wrights imagined changing the course of world history.

Langley wanted to be famous and rich. Langley was in pursuit of the results, not the cause. And just to prove that's true, after the Wrights took flight, after they became first, he quit. He was interested in the fame and the resulting commercial success. The Wrights were driven by a purpose. They started with WHY.

Another example. In 1963, 250,000 people showed up at the mall in Washington, DC. Nobody received invitations in the mail; nobody looked up the date on the website. 250,000 people showed up to hear the Rev Dr Martin Luther King, Jr.

The speaker points out that Dr King was not the only person who had suffered in pre-civil rights America. Dr King was not the only great orator. But Dr King had a gift. Dr King didn't stand up in front of 250,000 people and tell them WHAT needed to change in America. He told people what he believed. He started with WHY.

He told them what he believed – that there are two types of laws, the laws of the Higher Authority and the laws of man, and until the laws of man were consistent with the laws of God we did not have a just society.

Dr King started with WHY, not WHAT. He gave the “I have a dream” speech; not the “I have a plan” speech. We don't give our lives to a 3 year plan or a 5 point plan. Dr King gave the “I have a dream” speech. He started with WHY, with purpose, with cause. He started with what gets us up in the morning: WHY.

The theme for this gathering of our annual convention is taken from Ephesians: “Make Known with Boldness the Mystery of the Gospel.” I believe this strikes to the core of our purpose as baptized people. As living members of the Risen Body of Christ, we proclaim and embody (en-flesh) the Gospel – the Good News of God's love for all people.

What I do as a bishop is oversee a diocese – in the Greek “bishop” means overseer. That’s what I do. Rectors have things they do; deacons and chaplains have things they do; wardens, and altar guild members, and sextons, and vestry members, and secretaries, and those who make mission trips, and treasurers, and those who build Habitat Houses have things they do.

But if we are honest, it’s the WHY that gets the juices flowing, the WHY that sustains us when we are grinding it out in our necessary and sometimes difficult work; it’s the WHY which moves us to offer ourselves sacrificially. It’s the purpose, the cause. It’s what we believe – what we give our hearts to.

I believe in the power of the Gospel – the power of the Good News of God’s grace as revealed in Jesus – to raise the dead to new life. I not only believe it; I’ve seen it. Maybe you’ve heard Mark Twain’s response to the question of infant baptism. When asked if he believed in infant baptism, he said, “Believe in it? Hell, I’ve seen it.”

I not only believe in the power of the Gospel to raise the dead to new life, I’ve seen it. I’ve experienced it. And so, too, have you. And yet Mark Twain only got it half right. To believe something is more than an intellectual exercise. To believe something is to give your heart to it.

Father David Mossbarger, rector of St Barnabas Odessa, asked members of the congregation to write a two minute elevator speech on why they are Episcopalian. One person (marginalized by her previous faith tradition) writes of her first visit to St Barnabas. She says: “After receiving Holy Communion, guilt-free, I couldn’t hold back my tears. I was so overjoyed at feeling so complete and close to the Blessed Trinity during that hour. I hope I never forget that feeling. Until you are denied the Eucharist, you cannot imagine how much you long for it. This is the family meal for Christians and a foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet.”

Pat Russell, chaplain at Canterbury, welcomes college students from all sorts of religious backgrounds. This is one of many stories showing WHY we have campus ministry. Pat says:

“One evening my sermon examined the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. I shared my belief that the Holy Spirit gives us life, and constantly fills us and surrounds us with love. In my opinion, too many faith traditions believe that you encounter the Holy Spirit in one bolt of thunder after which you’ve been ‘born again.’ I asked them to consider the possibility that they had encountered the Holy Spirit in many instances such as viewing a beautiful sun rise, holding a newborn baby, or being present when someone you loved died.”

“One of the young men began to silently weep. When the service was over and everyone left the chapel, he continued to sit with his head in his hands. I asked if he was all right. He looked at me with tears in his eyes, and said, ‘Thank you for explaining that. I’ve always felt that I was just passed over because I never had that big moment.’”

Proclaiming the Good News is what we do. These stories remind us WHY.

Earlier this year I had the privilege – along with some classmates – of sitting at the feet of a master, a Canadian theologian named Douglas John Hall. Dr Hall is a theologian, a prolific writer, as well as a keen observer of the Church in North America. He studied personally under great 20th century theologians such as Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr. Of course, what makes him such a great theologian is that I agree with him.

In his recent book, “Waiting for Gospel,” Dr Hall reminds us that “Gospel is always NEWS – and never just yesterday’s news. Moreover, it is always GOOD news! But of course, news is only good when it confronts or engages whatever it is in our lives that seems wrong, demeaning, fearful, enslaving, humiliating, debilitating. ... To be Good News, Gospel must confront and do battle with the BAD news.”

He says, “Whoever wants to become the bearer of good news must know, as intimately as possible, the bad news that is just now, in this place, this time, this community at work keeping human beings in their various kinds of prisons. And of course, the bad news keeps changing.”

The context for the proclamation of the Gospel is forever changing.

Momentarily, Charlie Cook will be making a presentation to us on the changing times – the changing context of our vocation, our calling. I suspect he might refer to some of Dr Hall’s observations about the significance of living in a Post-Christendom world – that the so-called Triumphant Church of Christendom is being transformed into the Cruciform Church of today.

Dr Hall describes well the Cruciform Church, the Servant Church with the following. He says: “...instead of pursuing a God who carries us off to some ecstatic supranatural sphere, discipleship means pursuing a God who PENETRATES more and more deeply into the life of the world. And that God is found, not in places where religion traditionally has looked for God, but in places where God seems absent – that is, among the abandoned, the abused, the suffering, the marginalized.”

I acknowledge immediately that I think Dr Hall overstates this somewhat. As an Anglican inclined to the “both-and” more than the “either-or,” I believe that God is made known to us in traditional forms, such as the breaking of bread and the prayers.

But Dr Hall is correct about discipleship in this new day. The Cruciform Church, the Servant Church, will enter more deeply into the places where God seems absent – among the abandoned, the abused, the suffering, the marginalized.

One more story. This story is told by this summer's Happy Camp Coordinator, Alexis Nash. By way of reminder, Happy Camp is one of our Outreach Camps for at-risk kids. [I have edited the story for the sake of time.]

Alexis Nash writes: “One hot summer day out at Camp Quarterman, we were preparing to take a late afternoon nature hike. My cell phone began to buzz, and my phone read “Happy Camp Ben.” This was one of our remarkable and experienced counselors. . . . Ben asked if I could come to the boy's dorm quickly, because there was fighting going on.”

“As I arrived, I was briefly told the story: a camper was angry, getting in the other boys' faces, swinging his fists and ready to fight. I walked over to the young camper ready to handle the situation with firmness. I looked down at this child and recognized him immediately. He was my buddy, Mr Smith. [I have changed his name.] I had gotten to know Mr Smith over the past few days.”

“I was familiar with his story. He was the youngest of many children. In his file it stated that his father was ‘unknown’ and his mother was ‘deceased.’ She died of breast cancer 5 years ago at the age of 33. All of his siblings were split up among other relatives, and this camp was their time to come together once again as a family.”

“Mr Smith was calm but breathing rapidly. I told the other counselors to go on to the hike, and one counselor, Mike, stayed behind with me. I asked Mr Smith to stand up. I said we would handle the issue of fighting, but first I felt deep within me that this child needed a hug.”

“So I told him, ‘I’m going to place my arms around you, and I want you to place your arms around me, and I’m not going to let go of you, until you let go of me.’ We held each other for some time. I whispered in his ear that if he needed to cry it was okay. He began to cry. Then he began to sob.”

“It was at that point I realized his emotions were more than just a boy wanting to pick a fight. He was hurting; he was grieving for the mother he barely got to know. As I was holding this child I began to hum softly, and I began to pray: ‘Be still and know that I am God.’ I asked God to hold us and let Mr Smith feel the presence of his love. For almost 30 minutes this child sobbed – grieving the loss of his mother, grieving the loss of his family, grieving the loss of his childhood.”

“As the days passed at Happy Camp, Mr Smith blossomed. He was a carefree child; he laughed louder, ran faster, sang louder. A part of his spirit was healed.”

Alexis goes on to say: “This camp is far more extensive than just nature walks, fun games, and swimming. Happy Camp is a child’s safe haven from a chaotic world of heartache and injustice. Happy Camp is a place where children have the opportunity to come and just be children. Happy Camp is a place where God’s love is an omnipresent beauty.”

The Cruciform Church enters into the pain, the suffering. Ask Alexis Nash, and she will tell you that she encountered God.

Making known the Gospel is what we do. Stories like this one are why we do it. As we can hear from today’s stories – and I suspect you have stories of your own – the Good News, the Gospel, is never just yesterday’s news. It’s news NOW. And it’s always Good News. It raises people from death to life.

And as I look out among you at this gathering of this great diocese, I see people who believe that. You have given your hearts to it. You have given your hearts to the One Who raises the dead. And I count it a privilege and a blessing to serve you, as together we make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel in this new day.

