

“Resolved, that the 161st council of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas claims unity in the midst of our diversity through the gifts of our shared Baptismal covenant and our common conviction and proclamation that Jesus is Lord; and be it further,

Resolved, that all sorts and conditions of humanity, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, or sexual orientation, and especially all of God’s children entrusted to our care, are loved beyond measure by God in Christ, are welcomed and valued in our institutions, mission, ministries and parishes, and are a blessing to our collective life as we engage together in mission and ministry; and, be it further,

Resolved, that all people in our communities and their relationships receive the pastoral care, time, attention and honor they are due as God is revealed in and through them and as God works to change us all into a holy people.”

That resolution was passed yesterday as the Diocese of Texas gathered in annual council in Killeen. It was not a unanimous vote, but the passage was by a substantial margin. It was meant to be – and understood by everyone there as – an affirmation of the gay and lesbian members of Episcopal churches across this diocese and the wealth of gifts they bring to us.

The resolution was submitted and supported by the Reverend Chris Bowhay, St. Thomas, Houston; the Reverend David Boyd, St. David’s, Austin; the Reverend Russ Levenson, St. Martin’s, Houston; the Reverend Larry Hall, St. John the Divine, Houston; the Reverend Lisa Hunt, St. Stephens’, Houston; the Reverend Stuart Bates, St. Francis, Houston; the Reverend Dick Elwood, St. Martin’s, Houston; Laurie Eiserloh, St. David’s, Austin; Jim Cowan, Trinity, Houston along with myself. Two of those people are openly gay or lesbian and living in a partnered relationship of love and commitment.

It may not seem like much to you. There are no action steps. It doesn’t change any policies in the diocese. It doesn’t even outline any steps to be taken in the future. And, yet, it seemed like a lot to me because I had been a part of the work since last summer that eventually led to the adoption. It was a long road with many twists and turns – far too complicated to present with any detail here. The final result was far from where we began, and not everybody was happy. But it felt to me like an accomplishment.

I spoke to it on the floor of council yesterday – something I rarely do and really don’t like. In part I said, “I don’t believe it is a terribly radical resolution, and I don’t believe it calls for something different from what already exists across this diocese. It is important to state such things for as obvious as they should be, they are not obvious at all.

The greater significance of this... resolution lied in the fact that it is supported by people of diverse theological positions and deeply held convictions. It represents, I believe, a step in the direction of conversation and an effort to find those things that bind us together as God’s people...”

It is not a major step – and yet it is. At least it is a glimpse of something different. It is a vision of something beyond the division and separation along any number of fault lines. It is a step – albeit a baby step – toward something other than the bunker mentality that seems to have laid siege to our times ranging from politics to religion and touching all points in between.

It is a fragile thing. There is no coalition or agreement of principle. No hearts or minds were changed. We simply had a moment in which we listened to each other a little more carefully. It could fall apart over the slightest thing. But then hope is always fragile, that's what makes it hope. It is always a flicker of light in the darkness.

Jesus took Peter and James and John – the three disciples who seem to have been closest to him – and went to a mountain to pray. While they were there, Jesus was transfigured. The appearance of his face changed, his clothes became dazzling white. There appeared with him Moses, the author of the Law, and Elijah, the symbol of the prophets. They were talking together about the crucifixion and what Jesus would accomplish in Jerusalem.

It's a strange story really; it's a story of vision, maybe a vision of resurrection. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. What religion has yearned for and tried to produce has been accomplished in this act of sacrifice and love. It is a glimpse – a momentary and fleeting glimpse – of something beyond the limited world as we know it.

It is a vision – a glimpse – into the Kingdom of God – the world of resurrection, the world where things are as they should be. It is the place where love is the final ethic and where justice flows like a river. It is a moment when we care for each other not because we are on the same side but because we share the forgiveness that God has given all of us.

We aren't there. We are easily seduced by our egos and our fears. We aren't there by a long shot. There are people whose hearts are broken and whose lives are defined by misery. But there is a glimpse. It is enough. It is enough to keep us going and pull us onward.

As they were about to leave the mountain, Peter said to Jesus: "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings – three monuments – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah" – not knowing what he said. A different translation of the same verse says, "And Peter, not knowing what to say, said..." Peter, like many of us, often spoke when silence would have served him better.

Peter wanted to stay on the mountain. Peter wanted to hold onto the vision. If he couldn't stay on the mountain top, he at least wanted to mark the spot. But visions don't really work that way. The vision of a better world doesn't call us to the vision but rather to make the world a better place. A glimpse of a world where love really does rule the day and calls us to be more loving. At the end of the story the vision passes. Moses and Elijah disappear and Jesus' clothes return to normal. And they come down from the mountain.

There are visions – transfigurations – in all of our lives. I use this example of a resolution in diocesan council because I was a part of it, and it is fresh in my mind. But there are others. There are glimpses of glory. You have moments when you see for an instant what could be, what should be, what might be.

Make it happen. Come down from the mountain.

Amen.

The Very Reverend Joe D. Reynolds
Dean