



The late Bishop Robert J. Hargrove, when bishop of Western Louisiana, ordained me as an Episcopal priest after a rigorous program of preparation that included reading for orders with three priests and several summers of study in England and at St. Luke's School of Theology at the University of the South in Sewanee, TN.

I had been serving successively as lay reader in charge, lay missionary, and deacon in charge at The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd in Vidalia, Louisiana (on the Mississippi River across from Natchez, MS). The ordination and installation of a new priest took place there, with 135 people jamming the 90-seat nave. The service was electric with the presence of God; I wept my way through the prayer of dedication of a new priest (*Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 562-563).

After the service, Bishop Hargrove and I were removing our vestments in the sacristy, when he startled me with this bit of instruction. "David, do not ever become fully Episcopal." I was dumbfounded, having just spent two years in intensive preparation seeking to ensure that I was Episcopal through and through and not a Baptist in vestments. "Bishop, what do you mean?", I queried. "I've had it drummed into me to internalize the Anglican ethos. I don't understand."

"David, do not lose your focus on teaching and preaching the Bible and on reaching people for Jesus. Those aspects of your heritage we need in this church."

Many carry stereotypes of the worst-case scenario of a Bible teacher as one who thumps the book on the table or pulpit (or over our own heads) and say, "God said it. I believe it. That settles it." We may all too easily succumb to the temptation to ignore the Bible or to avoid the appearance of being like those whose emphasis on the Bible, though commendable, gets overdone at the expense of the gentle, the wounded, and the uncertain. By doing so, we deprive ourselves of a deeper reading and knowledge of Holy Scripture, our own primary source of authority as Anglicans.

And, many of us carry stereotypes of the worst-case scenario Christian witness, someone who collars you and demands an answer to the question, "Are you saved, brother/sister?" Again, in avoiding being like those persons, we can lose one of the central themes of Jesus' ministry and of his earliest followers, a passionate concern for the spiritual well being of those around us, a concern that prompts us to pray and to take the risk of rejection to share our experience with God and invite them into the richness of God's saving love.

Livelong Episcopalians sometimes unknowingly disparage newcomers and new members in their hearing by negative remarks about other religious traditions. Please understand that every expression of Christian faith is contingent and partial. Episcopalians don't "have it all" any more than any other confession does. We can learn from others and apply those learnings in our own unique, Episcopal way.

November 21, 2022

God's peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David".

David W. Perkins+
Interim Rector