



## SERMON 941

Eric Mancil's Ordination  
Church of the Heavenly Rest  
Abilene, Texas

Friday, June 12, 2015

1,001st Week as Priest

828th Week at St Dunstan's

93rd Week at Epiphany-  
Tallassee

## THE CALL

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Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:  
Such a Way, as gives us breath:  
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:  
Such a Life, as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:  
Such a Light, as shows a feast:  
Such a Feast, as mends in length:  
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:  
Such a Joy, as none can move:  
Such a Love, as none can part:  
Such a Heart, as joyes in love.

--George Herbert, 1633

*Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the  
Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.*

I bring you greetings from the people of the Northern Kingdom, the Diocese of Alabama, and our beloved bishop, the Right Reverend John McKee Sloan. Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

I am most grateful to Father Luke and the people of Heavenly Rest, to Bishop Duncan of the Central Gulf Coast, and to Bishop Mayer of the Diocese of Northwest Texas.

I am a Texan, and proud to be so, the third of six sons born to Bill and Carolyn Warren at College Station, where my father taught Animal Husbandry at A&M and coached the judging team.

But long before then, more than a 120 years earlier, my mother's people lived in the pine hills of Butler County, Alabama, where William Foster Alexander Glass scraped out a living on 80 acres of poor soil and his family attended the Little Sandy Ridge Presbyterian Church.

But the LORD God had bigger plans for us, so when William Foster Alexander Glass was brought up before the Session at Little Sandy Ridge--and excommunicated

for "drinking and fighting at church," the Glass family set out for East Texas, where they knew "drinking and fighting at church" would be considered normal behavior. He arrived in plenty of time to take part in the Texas Revolution of 1836, the Runaway Scrape, and the formation of the Republic of Texas.

And thus, we were born sons of the Lone Star, and we also proved the theory that if you look back far enough into your own family's American history, you're bound to find a horse thief, outlaw, or revolutionary—and sometimes they're all three.

But that's not why we're here tonight at the Church of the Heavenly Rest in Abilene. No, we are here to ordain one of the finest young men I've ever known to the Sacred Order of Priests, and to welcome this beautiful family into the Heavenly Rest household of God.

"It is a beauteous evening, calm and free," wrote Mr. Wordsworth, but he was obviously not out on the edge of the High Plains in the middle of June. For that English Romantic, the world was a deep green island, and when he reflected that "the whole Earth spreads out before me," he couldn't see the forest for the trees, much less the arc of the universe as it bent toward justice and goodness.

But that's why Leigh and I have come to Abilene tonight, to share with you a glimpse of the arc of the universe and of the kind actions and steadfast love of God, who would have as his purpose the holy calling of a young man and his family in service and love to God's people.

Thousands of years ago, Abram and Sarai were called by the LORD God from Haran to go to a new land that God would show them, a land of milk and honey, a country promised to their descendants for generations and generations, who would become as numerous as the bright stars in a Texas sky.

I believe it not entirely different from Eric and Chelsea's arrival at a place where T.S. Eliot would say,

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

Their journey, their exploring, began more than a decade ago when Eric and Chelsea came to Auburn as undergraduates, and Eric was recruited to sing in the student choir at St. Dunstan's, The Episcopal Church at Auburn University.

Eric and Chelsea went with us that Labor Day weekend to the Central Gulf Coast, to St. Dunstan's Annual Beach Retreat. On Saturday afternoon, they sat by the pool and talked with my wife Leigh about the Episcopal Church.

I worried that they might think they were joining a cult, but that was not it at all. They talked about worship in the beauty of holiness, and the sacraments of the Church. About the careful reading of the sacred stories, and the art of the biblical narrative. About the love of Christian community, and the calling of Christ to respect the dignity of every person. And most of all, to know that their lives were most remarkably and truly of infinite importance to God.

There are those among us, like Leigh, and our daughter Jenny, who are the great evangelists. They are rare among our kind, and they know how to say the magic words like, "Have you ever been to the Episcopal Church?" And "May I sit with you and show you how to use the Book of Common Prayer?"

I was in my early twenties, unchurched and cynical about organized religion. I met a pretty little redheaded girl at my work in Montgomery and asked her out. We had a great time. She was funny and I liked her a lot.

She asked me out on a second date. I said yes, although that was a bit revolutionary in 1976. Then she asked me, “Would you like to go to a wedding?” “No,” I said. “Have you ever been to the Episcopal Church?” she asked. “No,” I said, but I liked her, and she didn’t look like she would take no for an answer again.

So we went to a wedding at the Church of the Holy Comforter in Montgomery. I walked in and fell in love—with the architecture, the liturgy, the carved wood and brass and silver and stained glass, the people in the pews, the priest, and the redheaded girl. We’ve been married for 37 years, and I’m more in love today with her, and the Episcopal Church, and all the rest—even more than I was that day. I felt that I had discovered my true identity at the age of 24. And I think that Eric must have felt the same way.

So over the next several years, Eric was baptized (at the Beach Retreat, no less), and he was confirmed and Chelsea was received into the Anglican Communion. And after graduation I married them at St. Dunstan's. And a little later on we baptized their first child, Sophie, at St. Dunstan's, and then their second child, Jude.

All along, Eric and I were talking about God's call, and the vocation of the priesthood. And we entered the

discernment process together. And he began jumping through all the hoops, which are Legion, I might add, all the while teaching in Savannah, then Auburn, then Enterprise--and Chelsea was working full-time as a neonatal intensive care nurse, for she is a lover of souls in her own right.

And then, thanks be to God, the Bishop of the Central Gulf Coast, the Right Reverend Philip Duncan II, sent them to The Virginia Theological Seminary. *Hallelujah!* And Eric was ordained deacon at Christ Church in Mobile, graduated from VTS, and was called here to Heavenly Rest. It all reminds me a bit of our daughter Margaret's favorite childhood story, "Mr. Toad's Wild Ride."

Except that this was known in the eyes of the Maker, and carried out in God's time (which always seems to take a long time and requires infinite patience and calm assurance and ardent prayer, which is precisely why it works so well). And moreover this entire ordeal (if I may call it that) is marked by what we call back in Auburn "holy coincidence," which is a series of small, seemingly unimportant and unconnected events--occurring in a completely random and arbitrary manner--but which in actuality is what my Quaker brother says is "of God."

Now isn't that amazing? I believe that if we paid closer attention to what was going on, and if we actually opened our hearts and minds to the working of the Spirit, we would find plenty more of these holy coincidences in our own lives and circumstances.

Now, I'm not going to charge Eric with a litany of suggestions for what a new priest should be doing; I'm certain that he will be supported and cared for by Father Luke and all of you. But I do want to ask all of you to do this one thing: Please recognize that your lives are of infinite importance to God, and treat each other in that same manner.

Since we have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, let us live in union with him. We must keep our roots deep in him, and build our lives on him. AMEN.

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