



Sermon by the Right Reverend John R. Stephens  
Diocesan ACW Annual Meeting  
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What is most important do you think? It is a difficult question to answer as it may depend on circumstances and settings, but in your everyday life what is most important? What is central to how you live and how you approach other people and how you walk on this planet? What do you focus on? What gives you strength and purpose? What gives you meaning and delight? What do you focus on? What is most important?

On July 24, 2008, Barak Obama gave a speech in Berlin, referring to the tearing down of the Berlin wall which had taken place 19 years previously. This is part of what Obama said: "That is why the greatest danger of all is to allow new walls to divide us from one another. The walls between old allies on either side of the Atlantic cannot stand. The walls between the countries with the most and those with the least cannot stand. The walls between races and tribes; natives and immigrants; Christian and Muslim and Jew cannot stand. These now are the walls we must tear down." Beautiful words about what might be most important but also that we in this world have struggled to live into.

It is not the first time that we have been challenged to think about what it most important and even what God hopes for us as nations and as individuals. We heard from the prophet Micah this morning, let me repeat a little of what we heard: "God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." It sounds so easy but in reality, we find it such a challenge to walk humbly with God focusing on justice and kindness. Too many things seem to get in the way.

Jesus, in speaking about what is most important in living out the gospel offered a parable of how people will be judged by God. And it is not based on what so often seems to garner the most attention or what we hear most about on the news as to what Christians find central to the faith. It is not the issues that seem to divide our Anglican Church or other

denominations from one another. It is nothing to do with liturgy or the hymns we sing or who we baptize or who can get married or who can receive the Eucharist. It seems to have nothing to do with a correct way to pray or a correct way to interpret the Scriptures. None of this at all. Rather it seems to be much more about getting on with living out the faith. Just getting on with taking the words of Micah to heart.

Jesus said, just to remind you, that the ones who are blessed are the ones who gave a sandwich to someone in need. Or offered a cup of coffee to one who was thirsty. Or dug through their closets to find some clothes they no longer needed and offered them to someone who had just arrived in the country with no clothes to their name. Or despite it being the COVID pandemic found a way, while carefully distancing, to visit the one who was going through cancer treatments. Or the one who went to the local prison or the community meal or tent city and wondered if there were people who had no one to visit them. Jesus did not use these exact words but he did say "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to the one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Boy that really makes one think. But Jesus really knew how to do that to us, even if we do not always seem to take his words to heart.

At Synod, just a little while ago, we as a diocese spent time asking what we think should be the priorities of our diocese at this almost post-pandemic time. What is God, the Holy Spirit, calling us to do here and now? What is most important for the life of the Diocese and for us as individuals?

Today we are remembering Roberta Elizabeth Tilton, who is of course the founder of the Women's Auxiliary in Anglican Church of Canada. In 1885, she, along with six other women were instrumental in the formation of what is now the Anglican Church Women. It is a group that has taken seriously the question of what is most important. At Roberta Tilton's funeral on May 30, 1925, Archbishop John Roper, said this of her, "God gave to his servant Roberta Elizabeth Tilton great light of spiritual vision, wide sympathies with wisdom and strength of character, to enable her to use them for the extension of his kingdom in all our mission fields.... The secret of her life – and of its influence and power – was the personal service of our Saviour Christ."

So again, I ask, what is most important? In your life, in your faith, in your vision for your purpose? What is most important for the ACW of this diocese but also for you as an individual? For I think it needs to be linked with how Roberta Elizabeth Tilton lived her life. And it is linked to what the prophet Micah was calling the people of that time to live toward: do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with God. Or as Jesus told us, what you do for the least of these you do it to me. It makes you think doesn't it about what is most important and the decisions we make this day and all of our days.

It leads us to ask with Barak Obama, what are the walls that need to be torn down? For what is most important seems to be based on a gospel of loving God in return and loving our neighbour as ourselves. May we, like Roberta Elizabeth Tilton live in this.