

## The Great Warrior

Esteemed guests and delegates to this 142<sup>nd</sup> Council of the Diocese of the Northeast & Mid-Atlantic of the Reformed Episcopal Church. I bid you welcome to Grace Reformed Episcopal Church in Scranton, PA. I am privileged to be the homilist at this opening Service of Holy Communion. Thank you for your prayers on our behalf as we've dealt with several issues, including a move to Quarryville, PA on Monday.

Last spring, Jason Aten, a columnist for INC magazine, wrote an article about Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, subtitled, [How You Lead Matters](#). Cook gave the speech speaking to a [crowd of graduates at Gallaudet University](#). He spoke about leadership with these words: *I have one important piece of advice I want to share. So important, that it's the only piece of advice I'm going to share today. And that is this: Whatever you do, lead with your values.*

Aten, the author of the article commented, that's why those seven words--*whatever you do, lead with your values*--might be the most important leadership principle you'll ever hear. You see, leadership and values are inseparable. Notice that Cook didn't say to lead from your strength, with your heart or with your passion. A lot of people talk about leadership in relation to those things, and they are important, but Tim Cook said to lead with your values.

Values are the deep-seated, pervasive standards or guiding principles that influence every part of organizational life. It is also known as ethos. "Leading with your values," Cook said, 'means making decisions--big and small, each and every day--based on a deep understanding of who you are and what you believe.' Everything should start with your values.

So, who are we? I'll answer this in a moment.

Remember in school, perhaps in math class, when the teacher wrote a problem on the board and started to look around the room to find a poor victim to answer his or her question? And do you also remember sinking down in your seat and trying to hide behind the person in front of you because you had no clue? I've seen this same phenomenon at congregational meetings when the agenda calls for the election of delegates and alternates to church councils. I think better of those who are here today recognizing that many of you are sacrificially present at these meetings year after year. Clergy and lay delegates, today you have been afforded a

great privilege that carries with it great responsibility as you elect a Bishop Coadjutor for this Diocese.

By this time hopefully everyone has an understanding of my role as your Ordinary these past two and one-half years and Lord willing, in the next two years during the transition to new leadership. For both clergy and lay delegates, please be reminded that what you do today is not a popularity contest, nor is it a practical or utilitarian one – i.e., who may fit best with Bishop Chuck and his personality, or who will cost the Diocese the least or some other misdirected consideration.

The decision you will make today is based solely on values and who you believe is God's man for this time in the life of the Diocese who will lead this portion of Christ's Church into its next stage of life. The individual, serving as your shepherd; who will foster unity, uphold discipline, guard the faith and promote the mission of the church. All of us have had ample time to consider the personal information provided by the Episcopal Search Committee and Standing Committee about our candidates. You hopefully know each of these men well. Their combined time with time with us, as clergy in this Diocese, totals 55 years. Each will have a short time to address you while we're in session. I would be honored to serve with either of these men in the episcopate. I cannot emphasize enough the seriousness and importance of this election decision today. In the Anglican ecclesiastical context, it is the most important and vital election in Christ's Church to which anyone can contribute in fulfillment of our mission.

So, what are those values that will govern our decision today?

They are first formed by Holy Scriptures, particularly those passages that speak to clerical qualifications and character in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 and 1 Peter 5.

They are also formed by the vows and directives in the Prayer Book Ordinal.

They are further formed by our Constitutions & Canons and the 39 Articles of Religion.

And, if you recall, on the back cover of each edition of the REC100 Front Porch publication published since the fall of 2018, what forms us as a church is set forth as these Reformed Episcopal Values:

- A biblical world and life view
- Traditional Anglicanism

- Reverent liturgical worship with comprehensive churchmanship
- A missional community
- Discipleship and personal commitment to all members

We are in the octave of All Saints and the Collect, Epistle and Gospel read for the feast and again today provide a theme. In the Collect we asked God to, *grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living.* The Epistle, from the book of Revelation, opens a window in heaven to view *a great multitude, which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples and tongues standing before the throne.* The Gospel records the words of our Savior who said, *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Quite often, during the All-Saints octave, my mind goes to chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews and these words found in verses 33-38 that describe the Old Testament saints:

*...who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

I remind you that this chapter funnels down to chapter 12:1-3 where we are instructed to look to Jesus who endured opposition from sinful men, so that we will not grow weary or lose heart. In chapter 11 we read of Abel, Enoch, Noah and the so-called heavy-hitters Abraham and Moses. In verse 32, Gideon the Judge is mentioned along with three other Judges.

This morning I want us to look at Gideon who was, in the words of Hebrews 11, *made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, and put foreign armies to flight* to see what values made him a great leader and relate those to the responsibility that will follow in Council session as we choose our next bishop.

Once again, Israel fell into the sin cycle that brought judgment – this time it was the Midianites who oppressed them. They ravaged the land like locusts by taking the crops at harvest time and their livestock. They established their camp in the Valley of Jezreel. Jezreel means, ‘May God sow’. Ironically, Israel was not able to reap what they had sown or raised. The account of Gideon covers chapters 6-8 in the Book of Judges. We first find Gideon hiding from the Midianites threshing grain where wine is usually pressed. He is surprised by a visitor, the angel of the Lord who called him great warrior. The text in 6:14 is interesting. Please note, it reads, *And the Lord turned to him and said, “Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do I not send you?”* The angel of the Lord is speaking God’s revelatory words to Gideon.

Gideon obeyed the Lord’s command and tore down the altar to Baal, cut down the Asherah that was on his father’s property and built an altar to the Lord and offered a sacrifice on it. It was an incredibly difficult task carried out to the letter.

The testimony of the REC for nearly 150 years has been grounded in the affirmation of the truthfulness of God’s inspired Word written, as the church, during this time, has largely forsaken its heritage. From the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century European Modernism, to the Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the abandonment of orthodoxy by nearly every major denomination that continues to our day, the REC declared in the words of the Apostle Paul to St. Timothy, *All Scripture is breathed out by God...*

Every Deacon, Priest and Bishop must subscribe to the Oath of Conformity which says, *In the Name of God, Amen. I do solemnly swear that I believe the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that Holy Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation...* But there’s more to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, that is, *All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

Today a man, who has been equipped for every good work, will be elected Bishop. One who is not only a hearer of the Word, but also a doer. One who, in the words from the Thanksgiving we will be read in Family Evening Prayer tonight, who shows his thankfulness in sincere obedience to God’s laws.

Priority of worship

Prior to tearing down the pagan idols and offering the sacrifice to the Lord, Gideon brought another sacrifice to the visiting angel who consumed it with fire and vanished before his eyes. Also, in Judges 7:15 when Gideon and his servant Purah went down to the edge of the Midianite camp and overheard the telling of the dream and its interpretation concerning Gideon's victory, he worshiped God.

REC Mission Statement: *The REC sets her highest priority on biblical worship.* The All-Saints Epistle, from the book of Revelation, reflects what we will be doing for all eternity. It appears to be a continual preoccupation. This is where the discussion usually lands in any discussion about worship. How are broken and contrite heart values manifested? By a happy, clappy approach or in reverence and awe?

What defines Anglicanism? I've heard Bishop Ray Sutton say many times, 'Cranmerian Prayer Book worship'. I rejoice I've been part of that heritage for nearly 50 years. Your next bishop must be a prayer book man. It will be his rule of life. The Anglican Way will be his meat, his food that, with God's Word, will nourish his soul daily.

### Spirit led leadership

In Judges 6:34 we read, *But the Spirit of the Lord came upon (clothed) Gideon* and when this happened, the troops rallied and followed his leadership. This is one of the 17 times we read in the Old Testament of the Spirit of God coming upon someone.

I trust you've noticed that in the Prayer Book, the request for the coming of the Holy Spirit is throughout: In the service of Holy Baptism the minister and people pray, *Give thy Holy Spirit to this Child, that he may be born again, and be made an heir of everlasting salvation.*

In the service of Confirmation, the bishop prays, *Strengthen them O Lord with the Holy Ghost the Comforter, and daily increase in them thy manifold gifts of grace...* The bishop then lays hands upon the confirmand and prays that the confirmand *will daily increase in thy Holy Spirit more and more...*

In Acts 6:2-7 in the service for the Ordering of Deacons we read these words, *Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.* The ordinand is asked, *Do you inwardly trust that you are moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this Office and Ministration...*

In the Ordering of Presbyters, the bishop and presbyters sing or say the Veni, Creator Spiritus, Come Creator Spirit prior to the commendatory prayer and the laying on of hands by the bishop and presbyters as these words are said, *Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a Presbyter in the Church of God...*

Likewise, in the Consecrating of Bishops, the consecrating bishop and other bishops sing or say the Veni, Creator Spiritus prior to the commendatory prayer and the laying on of hands by the bishops as these words are said, *Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a Bishop in the Church of God...*

A dependence upon God's power and provision is necessary for a fruitful life and ministry. In Zechariah 4:6 we read, *Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.*

In Galatians 5 the Apostle Paul contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit characterized by love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. These are to be the abiding values of every Christian and certainly crucial to episcopal ministry. The shepherd leads his flock in the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### Trust God for the impossible

In Judges 7:2 when God gave Gideon the instruction to take just 300 troops to battle a multitude described as locusts in abundance, whose camels were without number and also as abundant in number as the sand on the seashore, I'm sure he was more than concerned.

So was Noah when God told him to build the ark. So was Abraham when God said go and I will give you a land, many people and cause you to be a blessing to the world, as was Moses as he stood before Pharaoh and demanded that he let God's people go, crossed the sea on dry ground and led them in the wilderness for 40 years trusting God for every need, and as was Joshua as the walls of Jericho fell with the blast of the trumpet and the shout of the army as the enemy was defeated.

So was bishop George David Cummins and 27 clergy and laymen who organized the first General Council of the Reformed Episcopal Church on December 2, 1873 to restore the old paths.

The Reformed Episcopal has its values. Gideon the Judge led by these values:

- Hearing and obeying God's Word

- Making the worship of God a priority
- Leading by the power of the Holy Spirit
- And, trusting God for the impossible

Psalm 83:11-12 Asaph wrote: *Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, who said, "Let us take possession for ourselves of the pasturelands of God."*

The decapitated heads of the Midianite kings Oreb and Zeeb were presented to Gideon by his troops. Gideon himself slew Zebah and Zalmunna with his own sword.

Geographically our Diocese stretches from Maine to Maryland. These are the pasturelands God has given us to tend. The evil one and his minions, like Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah and Zalmunna are continually trying to take our inheritance from us. Today, you will elect the shepherd who will lead you into the future. It doesn't matter how strong and great the enemy is or how few we may be in relation to the task. We wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. We cannot be like the 10 negative spies who spied out the land, but rather like Joshua and Caleb who encouraged Israel to possess their inheritance. We must smash the jar, hold high the light of Christ, sound the battle trumpet and shout the Good News of the Gospel. Today, you will choose the man who will wield that sword and lead you into battle to take what is yours by possessing the pasturelands God has given to us. It must be done prayerfully, wisely and in light of the values that define us as Reformed Episcopalians.

AMEN.