

The Dedication of a Church
Celebrating the 65th Anniversary of Grace Church on Russell Road
October 20, 2013
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Following Truth

The people of faith are always on the move. Faith is a great adventure, a journey. Often this might be seen in physical movement, going from place to place, answering God's call to be on the move, to serve. (I've been away three of the last four Sundays, in Boston, MA, in Berkeley, CA, and in Baltimore, MD). The life of faith always involves emotional and spiritual movement. We are challenged by doubts, despair, crisis and a search to find meaning, day by day. Our parish hymn, commissioned in 2005 for our Sesquicentennial, is titled, "Gracious God, you call your people." We sing, "Give us faith that risks and dares..." Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, the life.*" (John 14:6) To follow Jesus is to follow the truth.

Today, we celebrate our 65th anniversary of Grace Church located here on Russell Road. After the end of World War II, the leaders of Grace Church heard God's call to leave their original location on South Patrick Street and move to another part of Alexandria. The truth was seen in the changes to the neighborhood that had been our parish's home for almost 90 years. The truth was seen in the lack of parking space, in the limited possibility of growth and expansion. There was no room for a school. So the decision was made to move.

Responding to this call, following this truth took courage, faith and sacrifice. Jacob needed to find courage and faith to make his own sacrifices to follow God's will. Jacob had cheated his older brother, Esau, out of Esau's birthright as the first-born son. Jacob had to leave home, run away. As he travelled to a distant land, Jacob dreamed of God's abiding presence. He heard God say, "*I am with you and will keep you wherever you go...*"

I'm sure Jacob often recalled this dream, as he labored for many years to please Laban, his future father-in-law; when Jacob heard the report of the death of his beloved son, Joseph. Jacob knew God was with him even in Egypt, years later, when he discovered Joseph had not been killed; Joseph was alive and in charge of Pharaoh's store-houses.

Jacob becomes Israel, the one who struggles with God; the one who fathers 12 tribes; the one who follows the truth of God's promise, even when it seemed so hopeless, when all seemed lost.

Today, as we keep this anniversary, we recall Our Lord Jesus Christ who encourages his disciples to follow truth. Just hours before his death Jesus prays that the Church will follow truth in three ways:

First, disciples are to be in the world, fully engaged. There is no escape from the challenges of life, from illness, from evil, from death. Jesus asks his Church to witness to the truth of God's love in this world at all times and in all places. We do need times for retreat, for rest, for recreation, so that we may continue the journey, the movement; so that we may continue to hear and respond to God's call.

Second, disciples are to fight against evil in all of its manifestations: spiritual forces that rebel against God; worldly forces that corrupt and destroy God's people; sinful desires that draw us from God's love. These are the promises we make at baptism.

Lastly, we are called to work for reconciliation, healing, unity. Disciples, the Church, must overcome estrangement, fear, division. We are to show the world our unity as witnesses to the truth of God's love in Christ Jesus. I recently came across this old saying, "There will never be peace in the world until the power of love is stronger than the love of power." God's truth is the "power of love."

Sixty-five years ago our parish followed the truth to a new home on Russell Road. Ever since, all who have come here, worshipped here, have found the truth of God's love in Jesus Christ. We give thanks for all who have come before us. We give thanks for all who will come after us. And we pray to follow truth in our own day, in our own way, here at Grace Church.

Genesis 28:10-17

Psalm 84:1-6

1 Peter 2:1-5, 9-19

John 17:6a, 15-23