

## 2007: ST. MICHAEL'S CONFERENCE SERMON

*"There was War in Heaven" Rev 12:7*

It seems to me that the preacher on this occasion has two choices, either he can preach on St Michael and all the angels or preach on what this week of St Mike's Youth Conference is all about, what this week means. Perhaps foolishly, I plan to attempt to sum up or at least say some relevant things about the entire St Michael's Youth Conference experience.

Many of our rural churches in Maritime Canada have signs on them or by the roadway stating, "Enter, Rest and Pray." Perhaps your home parish has such a sign or perhaps you have seen such a sign. What does it mean? What is this statement of, "enter rest and pray?" If we think it simply means walk in, sit on our bums and then say a prayer, we miss most all of what is meant. We only touch the surface with such an understanding. If that is all we think it means we will be content with little, and mostly misled, by this superficial interpretation.

To enter, as the sign invites us, is no mere walking into a building, for to enter a church building is to enter a sacred space. It is to come apart. Our churches were built, usually over 100 years ago, for the sole purpose of the worship of Almighty God, Father Son and Holy Spirit. They are special, set aside, sacred spaces. They exist for a specific and an intentional purpose - the worship of the Christian God.

So too this week at St Mike's - we have come apart from the world, apart from our everyday lives, even from our summer time routines and we have entered a special time and place. We have come here. We have left much behind in order to be here, here where we learn and pray and share. Here at a special time for a special week at St Mike's. Here where the focus is not work, or routine or any manner of distractions but here where the focus is on God first and on Christian community devoted to God.

Those roadside signs also say "Rest." When we enter our churches it is not for rest in the sense of sleep or daydreaming - it is rest in the sense, yes of leaving the distractions and confusions of the outside world behind, but much more importantly it is for resting or focusing on our God. To rest, in this sense, means to abide in, to dwell upon ... our God. Rest in this sense is somewhat like the moment shared when a young woman places her head on the shoulder of the man she loves and dwells in, abides in, rests in, that special moment. It is a special, important, intentional resting, this resting in our God.

So too here at St Mike's - we enter this week to rest - to focus on our God. Not to sleep through classes but to listen, and think and question and learn about our God. To rest in Him, to abide in Him; in word and class and worship. Our goal, our focus, our purpose at St Mike's is our God. To rest, or abide in Him now.

Finally there is the term pray. Our Churches are first and foremost places of prayer. They are places built for prayer, places wherein prayer is offered up, places where God is worshiped and adored. They are not multi-purpose structures, a worship service one day, a meeting another, a dance the next. They are places devoted to a unique purpose, a setting for a special encounter, a meeting between the all loving God and his children.

So too here at St. Mike's, as all returnees know, and as all first year Michael-ites immediately learn, worship is not optional but rather central to what this week is all about: Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Compline and Holy Communion - all these opportunities to worship and to pray. Scripture is read, listened to, thought about - in a word, God's Word is encountered. Hymns are sung, God is praised - we worship with heart and tongue and mind, and here too Holy Communion is celebrated; reverently, deliberately with full knowledge of Whose presence we are in.

Finally, St Mike's is also about friends and friendships. The smiling greetings of Monday as well as the tearful goodbyes of today. Both are necessary and both are testaments to the power of this week. These

friendships too are good, indeed very good - and they are to be worked on, expanded and continued. You know best how to accomplish this.

I must end with the point that, as we do these things here at St Mike's, things we are reminded of by the church signs of 'enter, rest and pray,' we are to do them every week. The secret of St Mike's, the conspiracy of the adults if you like, is that we work and stress and pray that as you catch a glimpse of worship here this week you may take it with you and seek that same Spirit in your home parishes. We hope and pray that St Mike's is not an isolated event, a one-weeker, but a beginning or, better still, a step along the way to regular worship and daily Christian living.

As we are focused and intentional about our God here this week let us do so in our home parishes, let us take to heart the high calling of "enter, rest, and pray." AMEN.

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