**Sermon**

**170th Diocesan Council**

**Occasion of Harrison Retirement**

**And Election of Bishop Suffragan**

**By The Rt. Rev. C. Andrew Doyle**

We are gathered tonight

on the feast of the apostle Matthias

to give thanks to God for the ministry of Bishop Dena Harrison.

And, to pray and prepare to elect a new apostle to serve as bishop Suffragan for the west region.

Matthias, unheralded by some…

the Greeks say he was founder of Christianity in Cappadocia…

and the coast of the Caspian Sea[[1]](#endnote-1)

Coptic Christians claim

he prophesied in the “City of the cannibals”[[2]](#endnote-2) and to other meat eaters…[[3]](#endnote-3)

Some say Matthias lost his head in Jerusalem…[[4]](#endnote-4)

Others that he died of old age…[[5]](#endnote-5)

Dena,

you are heralded by many

You have ministered across the state and around the world

You have been in some church meetings where you thought for sure you weren’t getting out of there alive

And, you made a home among the bar b que meat eaters of Texas

Some say you lost your head, staying in Texas…

And, all are hopeful you will live a long, happy, and prosperous life…

The great theologian and bishop Clement of Alexandria observed about apostleship:

That people like Matthias were not chosen by the church or by God to become apostles because of some distinguished peculiarity of nature,

but instead were chosen by God and became an apostle because God sees, and foresees God’s ultimate work of mission and ministry.[[6]](#endnote-6)

As Luke writes in the Book of Acts,

“Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these you have chosen to take the place in this ministry and apostleship”.

Indeed,

God….in God’s good wisdom

chose you as an apostle,

as a bishop,

for this time and this place…

for this season in Texas.

You, Dena,

along with Jeff, Hector, and I (we must quickly add),

have created a much more robust ministry of Bishop Suffragan.

In Texas our suffragans work more than most Episcopal Church bishop diocesans.

One has more congregational mission to oversee, more dollars to manage, and more institutions to guide.

One’s impact on the local and wider church is greater.

Together we have created a powerful shared episcopacy…rare indeed…rare indeed…

At the celebration of ministry at Seminary of the Southwest

you responded to the accolades with these words,

“I did not do this alone.

What we have done we have done together.”

This is true.

Yet, we must also remind ourselves that not only were you at the bedside of the dying priest or clergy family member…

…not only were you there for people at moments of pain and suffering (for you are a shepherd of souls and a pastor to many)

…you also raised the work of bishop Suffragan to be responsive to the ministry context as God intends all apostles so to do.

Yes, you pushed congregations with honest truth.

Out of your pastoral equity formed with clergy and laity alike,

you challenged people into mission.

One congregation said, “we were struggling to decide if we should do a capital campaign and because of Dena’s words of challenge we did it and were successful.”

When Jeff as a rector, had to close his school, you were there for him as a bishop, friend, peer and guide. You did not let him shrink from the challenge but challenged him to rise to God’s mission.

You guided The Seminary of the Southwest in the calling of deans,

the healing of the past,

and expected greater governance.

You helped lead El Buen Samaritano to be one of the strongest community-based organizations in the region

…one that is sought after for its wisdom about best practices.

You helped St. Stephen’s Episcopal School through debt to health and vitality.

You have been present in the formation of clergy for over a decade and we as a diocese are benefits of the clergy that helped us ordain.

You built up programs like the Iona Collaborative that now train more clergy across the Episcopal Church through our Seminary than any other seminary in our church.

You have challenged many of us in this room to be better:

to be more faithful

and trust God in Christ Jesus;

to be better deacons, priests, and bishops.

And, I…and we…have not always liked to hear your wisdom and challenge.

No.

It was not always comfortable or pleasant.

But it was truthful and Godly.

We knew you were being faithful to God

and you wanted what was our very best for God and the church.

Yes. We did a lot with you.

We have accomplished it all with you.

But we did so,

because God did what God does.

God chose you in the power of God’s spirit to be our bishop and you have served faithfully and with distinction.

There is much we could have done on our own,

But we didn’t have to…because God gave you to us,

to me,

and to the people of the Diocese of Texas as bishop Suffragan,

as peer,

as mentor,

and as a friend.

And,

I say here then is no story of an individual’s perseverance

though that is part of the tale Bishop Harrison will tell.

Here then is no tale of an individual’s sheer will at work

though we have seen your determination.

Here then is not personal sacrifice for the good of the whole –

though we know of your, Larry and the kid’s courage and sacrifice.

No. Here in this moment we give thanks to God. As Isaiah proclaimed, in chapter 40 beginning at the 6th verse:

Because the God of Zion, of Jerusalem, brought through you good tidings, and we did not fear, and we saw God in our midst, and God did a might work through you. God was a shepherd through you, in God’s arms you have gently and not so gently carried us…

Tonight, in this room, at this table we give thanks to God for in you and your ministry we have seen God’s story enacted in our midst.

It has been God’s strength,

God’s providence,

God’s forgiveness,

God’s friendship,

and God’s tenacity

that is the primary actor in your life and ministry…and among us over these many years.

To God we give glory and offer our thanksgiving.   
To you we give our greatest esteem

for having lived as an apostle of the most high God.

And, we send you off,

knowing you have been faithful to God’s call,

done what was required,

and with a voice echoing in your heart: well done good and faithful friend.

Together, we now turn to tomorrow…

For tomorrow comes…and again a might thing is to be done.

We pray for God to continue God’s providence of sending Texas faithful and true pastors to govern our lives, our ministries, and our mission.

We know that god knows the hearts of the three candidates.

And, we know and believe God will reveal to us the one whom God has chosen…

…for the lot, tomorrow, will fall on one.

A person sat across the table from me in 2008

and told me he would not vote for me at the time of the election.

Then he asked, “Andy, what will happen if you are elected?”

I stumbled for a moment and said a few things – all now lost to history.

Then, he said, “No. Then…then…you will by the grace of God be our bishop.”

Tomorrow one of three disciples whom we have considered and now raise up to God, will…by the grace of God be our new bishop.

Bishops are not elected…they are made.

They are made by the grace of God to be friends of Christ,

In the fire of ministry they are made to challenge and to urge us forward to the kingdom of God.

By grace they are to be at our sick beds and at our board room tables.

By the grace of God they are to send us to do hard work that will demand our best efforts…

and by the grace of God they are to walk into that room with us.

Every bishop, like Dena, Jeff, Hector, and myself know…

God makes us and forms us for the moment in which we are to serve.

We do not choose this but it is God who choses and appoints us to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

God have mercy on us…for what we are about to do in God’s name.

For what we do tomorrow is to join God in calling from among us God’s apostle…our next bishop Suffragan…yes…but…

Nothing less than a successor to Matthias.

1. Alban Butler. "Saint Matthias, Apostle", The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints, D. & J. Sadlier, & Company, 1864. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Nicephorus (Historia eccl., 2, 40). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Eugène Acque. Jacquier, "St. Matthias." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 10. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 10 August 2014 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Tillemont, Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclesiastique des six premiers siècles, I, 406–407). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Hyppolytus of Rome. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Paraphrased from Clement of Alexandria observed in Stromateis vi.13. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)