

Guided by the Holy Spirit and the Church that nurtured them and formed them in deep and abiding faith since their time of baptism, today we give thanks that these two men, **Don Maier and Al Bruck** responded to the stirring of the Holy Spirit within them and entered the ministry of the Church in the 1960's. Don first in 1962 and Al 5 years later in 1967.

**Don was called from seminary to the mission field in Ghana, West Africa to establish an emerging Lutheran Church body. Al began his ministry in a mission start congregation, Gloria Dei in Bellevue.** After six years in Africa, Don was called to St. Timothy's in Portland.

Now, if I had the opportunity to pick a Gospel text for this day, it might have been the one appointed for two Sundays from now – *Matthew 14:22-33* – the story of the disciples on a boat, battered by wind on a violent sea and Peter's tentative walk toward Jesus. This is why.

When Al and Don entered ministry in the 60's, social and political norms were at the beginning stages of upheaval (think of the Viet Nam war, Woodstock and the sexual revolution, riots in Chicago at the Democratic National Convention and assassinations of JFK, RFK, MLK) and they didn't know it then, but the church body into which they were called and ordained (the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod) soon would experience its own upheaval. As The big C Church and its churches were tossed about on a raging sea of conflict and power seeking, Don and Al guided their congregations through the troubled waters. When engulfed in fear, they reminded their people of Jesus's words: "Take heart. Do not be afraid." When invited to step away from the safety of the boat that yet rocked in turbulent waters, they stood alongside colleagues and church members and ventured out of the boat in response to Jesus' invitation to "Come." When their congregations were gripped with fear and felt they were sinking as members left, new ones came and together they held onto Jesus's outstretched hands.

OR if I had the choice of a Gospel lesson for today, I might choose the text for next Sunday, *Matthew 14: 13-21*, the feeding of the five thousand. How many have these men fed with precious gifts of bread and wine? In West Africa, Estonia, Latvia, and across the churches emerging from the oppression of Communism, throughout Oregon and the Northwest Washington Synod, at Sunday worship at weddings, funerals, and ordinations, at bedsides of the homebound, the hospitalized and the dying, they broke bread and blessed wine and fed the hungry with the precious gifts of Christ's own body and blood.

OR I would choose *John 10:9-19*, the Good Shepherd text because these followers of the Good Shepherd who knew his voice and followed him became themselves shepherds over the flocks entrusted to their care. Yoked by their stoles to the church and to Christ, given authority to preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments, to care for the sick and suffering and give hope to the hopeless they have led their flocks from pasture to pasture through good times and trying times.

BUT, I didn't get to choose the Gospel text for today and the appointed text is one of parables: the mustard seed that grows into a great tree, yeast that leavens a whole loaf, a treasure hidden in a field, a pearl of great value, a net thrown into the sea that returns full with fish.

So I am going with yeast and how these two men have been yeast for the church and for me. We came to know one another in the early 1980s, almost 40 years ago. I was a new seminary graduate. Don was a provincial bishop of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (the group that broke from Mo Synod over Biblical interpretation and the ordination of women) and I was on the Regional Church Council. Don and Al were both involved in my candidacy interview which gave the green light for a candidate to stand for ordination. So they were among those who affirmed my gifts and my call and approved me for ministry! But before this, they had both led their MO Synod churches, Don in Portland and Al in Bellevue through a difficult process that eventually led them to leave the MO Synod and join the fledgling AELC. It was a small but mighty church body that provided needed energy to move merger talks among the ALC and LCA forward and to include the AELC. In the meantime, their congregations became lifeboats for people troubled by the uproar in the Mo Synod and looking for and needing a safe haven. The AELC was the yeast that leavened the bread of American Lutheranism that eventually yielded the ELCA. Don and Al stood firmly for the sake of the Gospel in trying times. They were yeast for the church.

**Don began his ministry at Phinney Ridge** on the day the ELCA came into being. Through a process of careful discernment, Gloria Dei in Bellevue decided to close in 1989 and send their members from across the metro area into their ELCA neighborhood congregations. Yeast for the church.

Don led Phinney to call Sheryl Biegert as Associate Pastor when calls for women were scarce as hens teeth. Following Sheryl, Vicki Morse was called to PRLC. He

stood for the Gospel of inclusion for all and was yeast for the Church.

Al invited me to be his very part time Associate at Gloria Dei during a time of transition in my life. Yeast for the church.

Understanding the Church to be a Mission Outpost for evangelism and outreach to those who do not know the love and grace of God, Don explored the Adult Catechumene in its early days of re-formation within the context of an increasingly un-Christian culture. He named it The Way, after the earliest followers of Jesus. And the rest, as they say, is history. Yeast for the church. Elected to be Bishop of this Synod, he was called upon to spread the catechumenate here and abroad and served the ELCA overseas, his missionary roots called upon again as yeast for the church.

**Al went from the Seattle area to become the Director of Spiritual Care in Providence, Rhode Island.** Caring for people at the most tender moments of their lives through direct care or the provision of care through other spiritual leaders, the Gospel message of compassion, forgiveness and hope were the grains of yeast sown among God's

beloved ones. Al arrived at Phinney to "check it out" on Easter Sunday 2012 and hasn't left. During your interim and the beginning of Pastor Hanson's ministry, Al came to know and love this congregation through visitation to the hospitalized and the homebound.

Now in order for yeast to leaven the bread, other things are needed: flour, warm water and a pinch of salt at the very least. I don't mean to imply that these men are saints – (they are not!) – but their lives of service to the Church have enabled the big C Church and the little c church be what it is called to be: the Body of Christ in the world.

It all began with their baptism when they were named and claimed as God's own and in the daily renewal of their baptismal vocation as children of God every day and in every way, by the grace of God.

Don and Al, on behalf of Phinney Ridge, a little c church, and the big C church you have served for a combined 105 years, thank you for being yeast that leavens the church. Well done, good and faithful servants.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.