

Rector's Report, January 24, 2010

These are my notes from my Rector's Report, which I presented as a Sermon on Sunday, January 24, 2010 at the 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. services. Since I do not write out every single thing I say, I have tried to make this version more cohesive than my original notes, which formed the basis of my sermon and report on Sunday. If you have any questions, please let me know. Thanks! Blessings, Teresa+ (The Rev. Teresa K. M. Danieleley, Rector)

Let us pray, using the words we proclaimed from Psalm 19: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, * O LORD, my strength and my redeemer."

Today is St. John's annual meeting – a day to reflect and celebrate the things that have happened at St. John's, Tower Grove, in the past year and to pray for God's guidance as we make decisions together for the year ahead. Two of the Scripture passages that we just heard seem to relate directly to the ministry and mission of St. John's – past, present, and future.

In the Gospel of Luke, we have Jesus' inaugural address – his Spirit filled, Spirit inspired mission statement and mandate:

14 Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. 16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

²⁰And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

I love this passage from Luke. I love the fact that Jesus' ministry is completely dependent upon the Holy Spirit and not on himself alone. The Holy Spirit causes Mary to conceive Jesus. The Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus like a dove at his Baptism by John in the Jordan River. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness for 40 days.

In order for us to continue to move forward in ministry for the Life of the World, we too must be completely dependent upon the Holy Spirit – carefully, humbly, and prayerfully discerning what the Holy Spirit calls us to as individuals and as a Christian Community, a part of the Body of Christ.

The passage from the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians is equally rich with wisdom for our life together as a community of Christians – the Body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12: 12 – 31a):

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ²⁶If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹But strive for the greater gifts.

Now we are the body of Christ.

God needs all of us – as individuals and as a community – to use all of our gifts to the glory of God. We each have different interests and talents. If we all had the same gifts or the same perspective on things, we would not be able to serve God as completely as a Christian community. It is okay for us to disagree about politics, worship styles, or Biblical interpretation. We are all made in the image of God. When we bring different gifts with us to the Eucharistic table and offer them to God, we recognize our common participation in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Through our worship and fellowship, we are strengthened for the many different ministries that God calls us to – here at St. John's, in Tower Grove, and in the wider world.

We, though many, are one Body in Christ.

Every year, a required part of my Rector's report is reporting on the statistics from the Service Register for the year 2009. As I tally the Average Sunday Attendance (ASA) every week, I often get so excited that I have circle the ASA number or add an exclamation point. Our ASA has steadily increased over the past five years:

- Average Sunday Attendance for 2005 – 43

- Average Sunday Attendance for 2006 – 61
- Average Sunday Attendance for 2007 – 84
- Average Sunday Attendance for 2008 – 91
- Average Sunday Attendance for 2009 – 98

The 10:00 a.m. service has been stable throughout 2009. The 5:00 p.m. service has grown; typically, there are typically 10-12 people at the 5:00 p.m. service right now. We have also had many more mid-week and Sunday evening worship opportunities this year – including Evensong, Lessons and Carols, and the 7 p.m. campus ministry service every Sunday night at St. Louis University's Busch Student Center.

We have been a “Pastoral Sized” congregation now for about two years . . . our Average Sunday Attendance is right between the low end of Pastoral Sized (75 ASA) and the upper end (125 ASA). Since last year, we have had a third lay delegate elected from St. John's represent you at the Diocesan Convention and Convocation meeting... Additionally, although we are still very relational and organic as an organization, we have a more formal leadership structure with a growing circle of lay leaders. God willing, we will continue to seek new ways to grow in faith, energy, discipleship, mission, and we will continue to bring new people to Christ and to this Christian Community.

Baptisms - 4

Marriages - 6

Burials – 1

Other Offices and Services – 8 (Confessions, Unctions, House Blessings, Blessings of Animals)

Now we are the body of Christ.

In the past few years, St. John's has grown and changed because you all have so generously shared your diverse gifts and talents. You have taken on the challenge of resurrecting a congregation that was on the brink of closure. You have taken risks, celebrated successes, and learned from mistakes.

So often this year, I have looked around and marveled at all that has happened here in such a short time – things that would not have happened without the faith, talents, and leadership of all of you. Even more amazing are all of the relationships and

friendships, prayerful support and fellowship that has taken place in the past few years. Most of you all did not know each other 3 or 4 years ago and now you have become part of a Christian community together – part of this limb of the Body of Christ, here at St. John's. In our worship, we are blessed by the incredibly talented volunteer choir members who share their musical gifts at the 10 o'clock service and other special services, under the direction of Michael Shirk, our Director of Music. Since Michael is on vacation this weekend, we thank Don Fisher for coming to share his gifts with us this morning! Volunteer guitarists – especially Dan Gibbons – play at every 5 p.m. service, helping us to make a joyful noise at that more informal service.

Throughout the year, a variety of small groups meet for Bible Study, prayer, and fellowship. We have just started a weekly Lectionary Bible Study every Thursday from 5:30 – 6:45 p.m. Lay leaders will host small groups in their homes during Lent. Community of Hope chaplains Phyllis, Dale, and Christine visits parishioners who are ill and homebound. Chaplain and Lay Catechist Jeffrey Deutsch is leading the “To Travel Together” group of parishioners who plan to be received, confirmed, or baptized in the Episcopal Church. This Lent, we will have a Lenten Quiet Day – a day of reflection, meditation, and centering as we walk with Christ toward the Cross and beyond.

We, though many, are one Body in Christ.

You all share your gifts, time, and talents in so many ways – providing childcare for our smallest members, serving on the altar guild, helping with the upkeep and repair of buildings & grounds – just to name a few of many things that you all do. Hopefully, we will soon have acolytes serving at the 10:00 a.m. service every week. This spring, the Malones and other leaders will organize a Trivia Night fundraiser in order to renovate the classroom and nursery spaces. If we raise \$7500, we can apply for a matching grant from the Diocese of Missouri. \$15,000 would go a long way toward giving our children the kind of space and resources needed to raise them into the full stature of Christ. We hope to begin the Montessori style curriculum “Godly Play” by this fall. There are several opportunities for us to learn more about how to support our children in their life in Christ. On February 21 & 28, my Presbyterian colleague Bob Hagel will lead us through “AAA” trainings intended to help us to become more Authentic, Available, and

Affirming Christians. Specifically, these trainings will help all of us to learn how to nurture our children and raise them into the full stature of Christ.

We had all hoped that the classrooms, bathrooms, and access ramp would be renovated as part of the Life Learning Center – a proposed day care center for immigrant & refugee children. Unfortunately, that project did not come to fruition. Instead, we must continue to renovate our buildings on a “pay as you go” basis in order to expand our capacity for ministry and mission. During the annual meeting, you will hear more about the vestry’s plans to borrow a modest amount of money from the Diocese’s White Fund in order to make urgently needed repairs to the Bell Tower, which houses the organ. Thanks to your generosity, we will also be able to renovate the front entrance to the Parish Hall this spring, using funds donated in honor of Jon and my wedding.

Now we are the Body of Christ.

Perhaps the most dramatic thing that happened in 2009 was the launch of the weekly Peace Meal Project – a free fellowship meal every Saturday from 4-6 p.m. Thanks to generous grants from the national United Thank Offering, the Diocese of Missouri, and a number of congregations, we were able to renovate the kitchen and send 7 of us to Safe Serve training in order to comply with Health Department requirements.

We are blessed to have a talented, passionate team of coordinators from St. John’s who take turns leading the Peace Meal every week and supervising the many, eager teams of volunteers from congregations and communities throughout the St. Louis area who come to cook and serve each meal. Thank you particularly to Peace Meal Project Manager Scott Splater, as well as Michelle Bowles, Allyce Bullock, Lucy Hale, Christine Cannon, and GW Kelly. Since the beginning of May, we have served a Peace Meal every week. Although attendance fluctuates, we have at least 45 guests at most of the meals. The weekend before and after Thanksgiving, we had 70 at each meal. With so many in our congregation and our community suffering from lay-offs, lack of health insurance, and rising costs, the Peace Meal provides a crucial meal. Perhaps even more important, the Peace Meal provides an opportunity for fellowship and community building, at a time when so many people feel isolated and alone.

We, though many, are one body in Christ.

Today you all will have the opportunity to re-elect three of the nine people who represent you on the St. John's Vestry. Your Vestry has worked very hard and prayerfully this year to make sure that we use our resources rightly to the glory of God. I am especially grateful to the Executive Committee, which meets between Vestry meetings – Senior Warden Julian Long, Junior Warden G.W. Kelly, Treasurer Nelle Garrecht, and member at large Scott Moore. These leaders, along with the other vestry members, work so hard and diligently on behalf of the St. John's congregation. I feel very blessed to work with the current Vestry. Next weekend, we will have a Vestry retreat in order to participate in a Mutual Ministry review process facilitated by Canon Dan Smith and to spend time planning for 2010. Next Sunday, we will commission the wardens, vestry members, and delegates whom you have elected as your representatives and leaders in this congregation.

Now we are the Body of Christ!

In this time of economic uncertainty, you all have continued to give money so generously to fund ministries through St. John's for Tower Grove and the wider world. Your commitment to sacrificial financial giving continues to be critical. We have much to celebrate, but we also have a lot of challenges ahead. Due to budget cuts and staff cuts in our main tenant organization, AMAAM, our rental income has gone down. This is also the last year that the Diocese will fund 20% of the minimum clergy salary package (approximately \$13,000 for 2010). I believe that we have the capacity to be financially self-sufficient congregation, but it will not be easy and cannot be taken for granted.

In order to expand our ministries and mission, we must invest significantly in making our buildings more accessible, energy efficient, and flexible. In order to meet the needs of Tower Grove and the wider world, we will continue to expand our service and advocacy ministries, as well as our community partnerships. We need to invest in training, renovations, and curriculum, and equipment In order to raise our children into the full stature of Christ. If you have not yet turned in an orange pledge card for 2010, I

hope that you will do so. If you have already pledged, I hope that you will prayerfully consider increasing your pledge or giving a designated gift to the building fund

We, though many, are one body in Christ.

On a personal note, thank you for everything you did to assist with Jon and my wedding – all of the help with the reception, as well as your prayers and support.

This year has been both incredibly difficult and wonderfully joyful for me. As you may recall, I was sick with whooping cough (pertussis) and a subsequent fractured rib from February until June. Then, there were the preparations for Jon and my wedding and the beginning of our marriage. Although my long illness was difficult for me and for you, I think that it did give me an opportunity to step back and reevaluate what I really need to do and what I should leave undone. It also provided an opportunity for the vestry and other leaders to assume responsibilities and roles that I was unable to fulfill. Some of those things are properly theirs to keep. Both my long illness and my marriage have caused me to consider the ways in which I need to adjust my priorities, habits, and schedule in order to live more fully and joyfully into my ministries as a baptized Christian, a priest, and a married woman.

It has been humbling and necessary for me to be reminded of my limitations. Your gifts and talents are essential in order for me to accomplish anything in my ministry. A priest functions as a part of a Christian community. I cannot be everything to everybody. I cannot and should not do everything that needs to be done by myself. Thankfully, because of you, I don't have to. None of us have all of the gifts necessary for ministry. **Together, we are the Body of Christ.**

God is not finished with us. I am sure that the Holy Spirit has many more surprises, joys, and challenges in store for us. May we continue to prayerfully discern God's will for us. May we continue to nurture and share our gifts. May we continue our individual and communal roles as members of the Body of Christ, this day and always.

Let us pray:

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.