

Rector's Report, January 18, 2009

These are my notes from my Rector's Report, which I presented as a Sermon on Sunday, January 18, 2009 at the 10:00 a.m. Service. 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. Mithen, Rector)

Gospel Reading: John 1: 43-51

The story that we hear in the Gospel of John this morning focuses on a dialogue between Nathanael and Jesus; it is a story of skepticism, evangelism, and discipleship.

When Philip, who has just chosen to become Jesus' disciple, approaches Nathanael, Nathanael responds skeptically, "Can Anything Good Come Out of Nazareth?"

Philip, undeterred, says "Come and See."

When Jesus encounters Nathanael, he states, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

and Nathanael asks, "Where did you get to know me?"

Jesus' somewhat strange reply is, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you."

Somehow, Jesus' strange reply is an Epiphany for Nathanael, who exclaims, "Rabbi, truly you are the Son of God!"

Jesus' replies: **Do you believe because I saw you under a fig tree? You will see greater things that these!**

During my time here at St. John's here so far, I have experienced all of the emotions of this story – skepticism that we could actually make it; joy when I had epiphanies – realizations of Christ's presence with us and Christ's call to us; empowerment to live into being Christ's disciple . . . The statement that Jesus makes at the end of this story resonates with me so much, when I reflect on this past year at St. John's, as well as the past 4 and a half years.

We WILL see greater things than these!

Every year, a required part of my Rector's report is reporting on the statistics from the Service Register for the year 2008. Every year, as I have tallied the Average Sunday Attendance (ASA), I have gotten so excited that I have circled the ASA number or added an exclamation point. As you can see, our ASA has steadily increased over the past four 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

Every year, as I tallied up Average Sunday Attendance, I would get so excited to see the tangible signs of growth. Like Nathanael, I have not necessarily given God enough credit. Every year, I think that our growth is unbelievable. But, as you can see, every year, our ASA has risen and, over the years, I have seen greater things.

We are definitely a "Pastoral Sized" congregation now . . . our Average Sunday Attendance is right between the low end of Pastoral Sized (75 ASA) and the upper end (125 ASA). Because our ASA exceeds 75, we now have a third lay delegate elected from St. John's to represent you at the Diocesan Convention. 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.

We must ask ourselves: Where are the new opportunities for evangelism? For discipleship? For living into the discipleship that Christ calls us to?

We will see even greater things than these!

Here are some Other statistics, which I am required to give you as part of the official annual Rector's Report:

- Communicants – 3445
- All Weekday Services – 126
- All Sunday Services – 177
- Holy Eucharists – Weekends – 142
- Holy Eucharists – Weekdays – 44
- Daily Offices – Weekends – 24
- Daily Offices – Weekdays – 87

Baptisms- 6

- Bishop Smith Baptized Wesley Balsamo on February 24, Bishop's Visitation, at St. John's
- Bishop Smith Baptized Dan Gibbons at the Great Vigil at the Cathedral on March 26; leaders from St. John's co-lead the vigil at the Cathedral.
- Baptized Cousins Jude and Giovanni on June 22 at St. John's
- Baptized twins Evelyn Raisa and Jesse Nikita Brower Toland, children of Brent and Susan Brower-Toland on All Saints' Sunday
- Baptized Asa James Sommer at Cardinal Glennon Hospital on November 18

Marriages – 4

- Emily and Steven (Colorado) – August 23 at Trinity
- Emily and Eric – October 11 in Tower Grove Park
- Max and Kati – October 31 at St. John's
- DeLyle and Jeffrey – November 15 at St. John's

Burials – 3 (two in the last week of the year)

- one for a member of the wider St. Louis Community
- one for Dorothy Brown, Marcia O’Connell’s Sister in Law (December 23)
- one for baby Asa James Sommer, son of Andrew & Rebecca Sommer, my neighbors (December 31)

Other Offices and Services – 15 (Confessions, Unctions, House Blessings, Blessings of Animals)

We will see greater things than these!

Going beyond the numbers, let’s celebrate some of the great things that we saw this year!

Worship Services are growing and expanding:

Under the leadership of new Director of Music Michael Shirk, Evensong services have begun on the last Sunday evening of each month. The choir - which sings at the 10:00 a.m. service, at Evensong services, and at special services - sounds amazing!

Christmas was magical. Even though I had spent so much time with Michael planning the Christmas services, I was surprised and blown away by how wonderful Christmas was this year!

Both our Christmas Day services and New Year’s Eve services have outgrown the chapel. We often have a “Goldie Locks” problem. The Chapel is now too small for the 5 p.m. service, or services on Christmas Day or New Year’s Eve. Sometimes, because St. John’s was built in a different era and is one of the largest church structures in the Diocese, the main church can feel too big.

In the past year, the 5 p.m. service moved from the Chapel to a new worship area at the back of the church. The 5 p.m. service has now grown enough that we need to flip more

pews around the back worship area in the main church in order to accommodate everyone who attends the 5:00 p.m. service and to allow for further growth.

Our Sunday evening services at St. Louis University take place every Sunday evening at 7:00 p.m., usually in the Busch Student Center. One of our seminarians, Kathi Wilson, helps to lead these worship services. Kathi and I also have office hours at the Busch Student Center every Tuesday. Episcopal Campus Ministry at SLU, sponsored by St. John's, has grown steadily as we bring more young people to Christ and to the Episcopal Church.

Here are some other great things that happened in 2008:

- Started Small Groups in Parishioners' Homes in Lent – which continued throughout the summer and fall, and will resume this March, when Lent begins.
- St. John's volunteers offered Hospitality at PRIDE Fest – before and after Mass in the Grass, during the Parade (Coffee hour, water, bathrooms)
- The St. John's Vestry affirmed what who we already are and what we already do by voting to become a Proud Parish Partner of Integrity USA, which means that we are listed on a national Integrity website, which should increase our credibility as an open and affirming congregation for people from all walks of life and all sexual orientations
- I was also asked to serve on the Board of the new LGBT Community Center of Metropolitan St. Louis, which also increases our visibility in the LGBT community
- I completed my second residency for the Doctor of Ministry program in Chicago in July
- Presented my Congregational Study of St. John's you for several weeks in October and we had some great discussions about St. John's past, present, and future

- Held a Shower and Send Off for Susan and Brent before they headed off to Kazakhstan to meet twins Evelyn and Jesse – whom we welcomed back in August and baptized on All Saints' Sunday
- Welcomed newborn babies Eva Sophia Malone and Carmen Celeste Rowlyk, as well as many other new parishioners and visitors

Peace Meal Project

Scott Splater offered his gifts of project management to lead a team to prepare for the beginning of the Peace Meal Project. Even though we've had some delays, I know that, when it starts this Spring, the Peace Meal Project will be a great service ministry to the wider Tower Grove community. The Diocese of Missouri's New Ventures in Community Ministry Fund granted St. John's \$17,000.00 to help us start the Peace Meal Project full-time this Spring.

New Partnership

In 2008, we embarked on a partnership with the Islamic Foundation of St. Louis which will enable us to renovate the Parish Hall radically in order to expand our capacity for mission. The renovations will give us new bathrooms, a new accessible entrance, and new nursery and Sunday School space. St. John's will have full access to these spaces on nights and weekends. The "Life Learning Day Care Center" will operate as a day care center Monday – Friday, 6 a.m. – 6 p.m.

We will see greater things that these . . .

Despite layoffs and economic uncertainty, you all have stepped up to the plate, gone deeper in your call to discipleship, just as Nathanael did. For 2009, we have \$76,590.00 in pledges so far, from 35 households. Your commitment to financial giving is important - to make sure that our regular worship services, fellowship events, Christian Education events, Baptisms, and other ministries continue – and your commitment to financial stewardship is crucial as we start the Peace Meal Project, begin major renovations, and continue to expand our worship services, ministries, and outreach to the community.

Our current support from the Diocese is 20% of the minimum clergy salary package (approximately \$13,000.00 for 2009). This decrease is on schedule - down from 40%, approximately \$26,000.00 in 2008 - although we are also getting an additional grant for operating expenses of \$10,000.00, for a total of approximately \$23,000.00 in Diocesan support for 2009. With the continued support and leadership of you all, we will be a financially self-sufficient congregation in 2010. Although this is on schedule with the Diocesan grant that started in July 2004, when I arrived here to become your rector, I think it is pretty incredible that we are actually so close to achieving this goal. When I started in 2004, I was skeptical that we would be able to become self-sufficient. But, God has shown me and shown you greater things than I could have asked or imagined!

After 4 and a half years as your rector, I am starting to feel like I know what I am doing at least some of the time. After 4 and a half years, I feel settled in for the long haul. You're stuck with me for a long time to come. After just four and a half years, I look around and I can't believe how much "Good has Come of out of Nazareth" – how, from such humble beginnings together in 2004, we have grown into this amazing congregation with new programs, new babies, new families, new worship services, new mission programs. Christ has asked us to be his disciples. Like Philip and Nathanael, we have stepped up to the plate – growing in faith, growing in energy, growing in numbers, growing in discipleship, growing in mission.

On a personal note, I am so grateful that you have welcomed Jonathan, my fiancé, with open arms and hearts. Everyone is invited to our wedding on September 26. Thank you for your prayers and your love for us.

We will see greater things than these!

Back to the Gospel story from John: The story that we heard from the Gospel of John this morning is a story of Evangelism and Discipleship. Philip was called by Jesus, Philip calls Nathanael and is persistent when Nathanael is skeptical. Philip says, "Come and See." Soon after, Nathanael had an "Epiphany" that might seem absurd to us (Jesus recognized him under the fig tree), but it was important to Nathanael; it "got him in the door" as a disciple of Christ, who then brought others to Christ.

We will see greater things than these.

God is not finished with us, and so I conclude this report with questions for us to pray about, ponder, and act upon as we move forward in ministry together for the Life of the World.

How do we help people know the Lord and help them recognize God's call for them?

What is God calling us to next?

What great thing will we see next?

Amen.