

**Rector's Address**  
**Sunday, January 29, 2017**  
**St. Anne's Episcopal Church**

Such great scriptures given to us today...so many sermon possibilities. But today is our annual meeting, and as is our custom, during the sermon time we have the rector's address. But the address really is a sermon too.

A Review of 2016

Since I arrived seven years ago, we have, as a parish, been very much singularly focused - inwards. We have been reorganizing how our parish works with various ministry teams, and vestry responsibilities. We have a new food pantry, a new sound system here in the church, and new lighting in the church and in the narthex.

This past year we embarked upon a capital campaign. As a parish we joined together and committed to a \$500,000 building project to update and repair our 30 year old campus. Many were excited about this adventure, while some were doubtful. Since last year:

- We have completed a new chapel, that serves the parish wonderfully for funerals, small weddings, and ongoing parish needs.
- We have a new west parking lot -- all the potholes and poor drainage are gone -- and a driveway that connects the east and west parking lots easing traffic flow and allowing easy access for emergency vehicles.
- We have a new choir room which provides great acoustics for our music ministry, as any member of the choir will attest.
- We created a permanent conference room for staff meetings, vestry meetings, diocesan meetings, and bible studies.
- We have relocated the Betty Meyer garden outside the walls for the entire community to enjoy. Already this past Fall we noticed that members of the neighborhood were quietly sitting in the garden and enjoying the beauty.
- In the midst of our construction we learned that, due to ongoing leaks and age, all the insulation had sagged down - it had fallen and was resting on our ceiling tiles or completely missing. The insulation was re-hung and new insulation blown in on top. As a result, we are saving over 20% on our utility budget or \$3200 yearly!

And even with all of that, there is much more to do. The east parking lot will need to be fixed in the near future. Our entry doors are deteriorating and will need to be replaced soon as well. And the kitchen. We simply ran out of funds to do everything due to unexpected changes we incurred such as the insulation work. These needs are not going away, but may well need to wait for another day unless God has other plans!

### A New Focus

This past year saw a contentious election take place...a new administration has taken office and for many in this country, their focus has shifted. But *our* focus must be Jesus Christ. Our focus must be on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the place of the cross in our own lives. What it means for me, not for the person sitting next to me, but for me...what does it mean to carry the cross today? What does it mean for me as a Democrat, as a Republican, as an Independent...what does it mean for me to carry the cross of Christ into the world?

It's time to change our focus. I don't mean politically, I mean spiritually. At the end of the day, our politics, however leaning, must be seen through the cross of Christ...it must be engaged through the non-negotiables of our faith, it must be lived out through our baptismal covenant!

We mustn't get this backwards, we must never define our faith through the lens of our politics...we must always define our politics through the lens of our faith! In this day and age, it seems like more people would be willing to die for their politics than would ever consider dying for the faith! Where is the cross of Christ? We must act from and through the cross...make no mistake about it...we must act...but it must be through the cross!

### Discovering and Using Our Gifts

Most recently we have, as a parish, completed the SEEK initiative and attended the Commission on Congregational Vitality (CCV) workshop. Both vehicles are pointing us in the same direction. To that end, we have formed a Spiritual Growth Team, charged with making things happen. From small group studies to visitor ministry to evangelism and marketing and much, much more. Our focus is moving...no longer focused internally, no

longer consumed only with what's happening inside the walls of St Anne's, our attention, our focus, our ministry now turns to outside the walls of St Anne's as well.

It is essential that we understand that each of us is an important, essential part of the Body of Christ. Each of us is gifted by the Father, by the Son, and by the Holy Spirit for the work of ministry. The ordination vows for the priest make it clear that the true ministers of the church are not the bishops, not the priests, not the deacons - the true ministers of the church are the baptized. The baptized--each of us sitting in this sanctuary using our gifts and talents to serve as a member of the body of Christ. I can't urge you strongly enough, please take part in the small group studies that are about to begin. Please learn **about** and understand **how** to use the gift God has given uniquely to you. We can't be a complete Body of Christ when some of us, when many of us are missing! You are important, you are needed.

### The Gift of Presence

I recently completed some research and want to share the following results with you. The first full year I was here, 2011, we had an average Sunday attendance (ASA) of 175. This past year, 2016, we had an ASA of 130. Since I arrived we have seen approximately 50 people leave St. Anne's for various reasons. So it makes sense that we are down to 130 each Sunday...but it doesn't make sense! It doesn't make sense because since I arrived we have also seen approximately 60 people join St Anne's. Do you see the disparity? We have actually grown in members but shrunk in weekly attendance. I don't know the reason for this...cultural, generational, or what, but it's not unique to our parish...this is true across most of American Christianity. We have approximately 30% fewer people coming each Sunday even though we have the same or slightly more members.

I bring this up because I want you to know that you are needed! You are important. Each of you is unique, with a gift and talent that God has given you and made you unique to the Body of Christ that is St Anne's...and when you are gone, the body is incomplete. You are needed. This is what the communion of the saints is all about: gathering together to worship, to pray, to fellowship and to love. The admonition from the book of Hebrews is to NOT forsake coming together as God's people...Do It! Gather together, strengthen your faith, be fed, and go out and give it all away as you walk in the cross of Christ, as you live out your Baptismal Covenant.

## The Gift of Evangelism

What is an Episcopalian? Who are we, as Episcopalians? What do we believe, how do we live out our faith? Nobody seems to know: your neighbors, your workmates, maybe not even your family. I know this is true, you want to know why I know? Because that was true for me too: I went to an Episcopalian seminary as an Orthodox candidate for Holy Orders and I didn't have a clue what an Episcopalian was. But once I learned, I became one! We are the church of the *via media*...meaning that we choose to live together in tension with one another even when we disagree with one another. Conservative/Liberal, Republican/Democrat, Traditional/Progressive: we live in tension with one another even when we disagree with one another because we have Jesus Christ as our Lord. People don't know what an Episcopalian Church is...We need to change that!

## The Gift of the Baptismal Covenant

In our OT reading today we heard the encouraging words of warning from the prophet..."God has shown you, mortal, what is good and what the Lord requires of you...To do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

Said another way, we are being encouraged to live into our baptismal covenant.

- To proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ
- To seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as you love yourself
- To strive for justice and peace among all people
- To respect the dignity of every human being.

We need to once again be a voice in the public square...at school board meetings or city council meetings. We need to be with the homeless and the abused. We need to be the Body of Christ, working together for those less fortunate in our community. We need to learn how to do justice, we need to learn how to love mercy, we need to learn how to walk humbly before our God.

I am praying for the Holy Spirit to raise up amongst us, a person who will lead us in this ministry. To help us focus our vision, our energy, our gifts outside the walls of St Anne's. To pick up our cross and bring justice, mercy, love, and dignity to those in our community.

### My Vision for St. Anne's

In the 1940s, William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury, said this -- it was true then and it's still true today -- *"The church is the only organization that does not exist for itself, but for those who live outside of it."*

It is my prayer that during this coming year, we will reach outside of the walls, we will touch hearts and hands in our community. That we will seek and serve Christ in all Persons and learn to love our neighbor as our selves.

It won't be easy, it's not natural...but this is the charge the prophet Micah lays before us today:

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?”

This is the contract we agree to in our baptism and our confirmation. This is what it means to carry your cross. This is the work that God has given to the Body of Christ.

And to ensure the work can get done, God has gifted each of us uniquely so that together we can be the Body of Christ and together, through the shadow of the cross, we can do justice, we can love mercy, we can walk humbly with God. Together,... this call to ministry is something we as St. Anne's can do. Amen.