

Vestry Homily 2023

February 12, 2023

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Because we will be meeting as Vestry following our service this morning, I will try to be a bit judicious with my time – I am hoping that we will be able to regather here in the sanctuary at around 11:45 and do everything that we need to do to comply with the Vestry requirements, have enough time for a brief conversation about where you might be heading in the next year, and still get home before dark. And, after all – it is SUPERBOWL SUNDAY!!!!!! (Yawn)

The name Vestry comes from the original meetings of a parish which were held in the Sacristy of the church. Another name for the Sacristy is the Vestry.. The Vestry is where the clergy get all gussied up and dressed for services, a process designated as “vesting” which came from the French “vestu” meaning “ to be clothed” which in its turn hailed from the Latin “vestis”...ain’t the English language fascinatin’?

The purpose of Vestry is to be, as Randy Bachman sings, “takin’ care of business” and involves a number of requirements: the acceptance of audited financial statements and the passing of an annual budget; the election and /or appointment of a variety of “officers”: of the parish such as Wardens and the Treasurer and the chairs of various committees; the affirmation of parish ministries such as Lay Readers; the election of members of the diocesan Synod; the discussion of and often approval of proposed plans for the coming year; the annual well-deserved praising to the heavens and beyond of the parish clergy etc. At the end of the meeting, the results of the deliberations and elections and appointments must be sent to the diocese where a copy of the proceedings will be housed in the diocesan Archives until the end of time.

The annual meeting of Vestry is a time for a parish to come together as a family to reflect on the past, look at the present and dream the future. Its’ purpose and nature SHOULD NOT BE seen as an opportunity to air grievances or to try to embarrass anyone or to lay blame on individuals or to rehash old histories; it SHOULD BE seen as a God-given gift of time for a faith community to, as the prophets all say, “see visions and dream dreams”. Each Vestry meeting is unique because each parish is unique and precious in its own way and the nature and tenor of Vestry meetings in a parish may vary dependent upon the issues which rise to the surface in a given time and place. After doing more than fifty of these, I can attest to the wide variety of such meetings.

This year, we have been challenged by Bishop Shane to change the future or to be changed by the future. While a resolution to the current situation here will not happen this afternoon, this Vestry will, I hope, begin a process of discernment to answer an ancient question in Latin, “Quo vadis?”: - in English, “Where are we going?”

This question is as old as the Scriptures -- when Moses and the children of Israel set out to cross the Sinai seeking God's land of hope and promise, they did not KNOW either where they were heading nor what lay before them. For forty years, they wandered through the desert places, seeking this Edenic new beginning and not finding it. Yet they continued because they all shared a certainty: that God was with them on the journey and would continue to guide their footsteps until they found their resting-place in "the land which the Lord our God has given us." They trusted the God of Sinai not only to watch OVER them but to walk WITH them through the searing heat and the frigid cold, in oases and arid valleys. When Jerusalem was sacked and the citizens of the city were taken into exile by the Babylonians, they KNEW of a certainty that, as they sat by the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers and dreamed of the past, rued the present and hoped the future, that the God of their ancestors was there with them, sharing their pain and their sense of abandonment until the time was ripe when the Lord God of Sarah and Abraham, of Isaac and Leah, of Hagar and David, of Moses and Ruth took them by the hand and led them home once again. Following his baptism, Jesus is thrown into the Jordanian wilderness by the Holy Spirit where he wrestled with his own particular demons and underwent a discerning time with God. While there, Scripture tells us that angels ministered to him and when Jesus emerged to begin his ministry, he KNEW for a certainty that what God said at his baptism was TRUTH -- "you are my son, my beloved one in whom I am well pleased". This relationship, the closeness, this bond of affection and commitment between Jesus and God sustained him through his life and was ever-present, sustaining and holding him through moments of brilliant light and the darkest shadows. The earliest community which gathered around the carpenter from the Galilee were able to leave Jerusalem and go into all the world because they KNEW that whatever happened to them as individuals and as community was part of God's plan, a plan in which there was a blessed assurance: Jesus had told them and they believed it when he said, "Do not be afraid, for I am with you until the end of time>"

This assurance, this promise of the ever-presence of the Lord is what will guide you on your pilgrimage into the future; this gift of a relationship between yourselves and the Creator will not fail, even when you may not feel the divine presence; when you cry as Jesus did, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani" -- "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" When Jesus says to you, God's family here at Holy Trinity, "Come, follow me", you will be able to move forward into an unknown time and uncertain future KNOWING that you are not walking or stumbling alone, but that the Spirit that breathed over the waters of chaos at first creation will caress your faces, calm your fears and fill your sails so you may land safely on the new shore in the place where God wills you to be. Rely on one another; spend time in prayer with the Spirit; reflect with one another; hold on to the lessons of the past and the present; and at times, just "sit and be still in the presence of the Lord." God knows his plan, his desire for you... Trust in the Lord and in

one another to rebuild Holy Trinity so you may continue to be that shining light of hope, joy, compassion and blessing you have always been.

So, my sisters and brothers, do not be afraid of change; do not be afraid to change. Remember that in order for crops to grow and flourish, the land must be renewed and sometimes even ploughed under in order that the seeds which God wants to plant in this place will find their nestling place where your roots will go deep into the good earth and establish a firm foundation for the people whom God has always loved and will always hold in the palm of his hand and in the beating of his heart.