

Sermon for the Feast of Christ the King

Annual Parish Meeting 2016

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Canticle 16

Colossians 1:11-20

Luke 23:33-43

November 20, 2016

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We are gathering on the Feast of Christ the King. If this were a secular occasion it would most closely resemble New Year's Eve. The church calendar year differs from the world's calendar. Our year draws to a close a little more than a month early. Today, we say farewell to the old, the Lectionary readings from the Gospel of Luke. Today is known as the Feast of Christ the King. Our year of focusing on the life of Jesus of Nazareth through the lens of Luke's perspective, seeks to celebrate the Savior we have come to know through the window of Luke's writing. This is the culmination of the story of the life of Jesus as Luke would have us understand him. Luke as is true of all gospel writers contains materials all their own. Well known parables such as the Prodigal Son, Good Samaritan, and others are found only in Luke's material. We will have to wait three years before they return again.

Luke's theme as we learned a few weeks ago is: "For the son of man came to seek out and save the lost." Today's lesson is drawn from the crucifixion narrative showing that even at the cross, Jesus is saving those who are lost. Criminals are typical of the kinds of folks whom Jesus had engaged with in the past. Now common criminals condemned for their crimes are getting what they justly deserved. But getting what we deserve is not God's way. Instead, Jesus offers God's forgiveness and mercy and a promise of eternal life in paradise.

That changes everything. We follow a servant leader, not someone separated from the masses but integrally a part. A leader who came not to be served but to serve to quote the theme of another Gospel.

We too seek to serve and model Jesus' mercy in the world around us.

What a year it has been. No, I am not speaking about the presidential election but rather what a year it has been here at St. John's.

As you recall, last year at this time, we were in the midst of transitions: Kim Glenn had arrived in June and we were anticipating her ordination to the priesthood. (The anniversary of her ordination is coming up on in Dec.). In the Fall, we had welcomed Nicole Cook as my executive assistant and Monika Lankford as our parish business manager. It was a time of excitement with new energy all around. This year, we have been blessed with additional transitions about whom I will have more to say in a minute.

Last year, our Mission Action Task Force reported out our learnings on producing our Mission Action Plan. That intentional process of discernment looked carefully at what it means to be "missional." What does it mean to say that we are a missional church? Something of what that means is captured by our mission statement. We live by faith, share Christ's love, and are a voice of hope for all.

We are missional people. By that we mean that we are:

- Outwardly focused and compassionate
- Are involved in addressing the needs of others
- Step forward and engage the world around us
- And live the mission of the church

As a missional church we:

- Understand that God is at work in this community
- Practice hospitality by getting to know our neighbors
- Are a faith community willing to be Christ's people
- Are a healing community where people carry each other's burdens to help with recovery

What this means is that as we evaluate new possibilities, we do so with a certain lens, a filter that allows us to ask key questions to determine if this might indeed be part of God's hopes for our congregation. There is no limit to the number of "good" ideas or things we can do. As we reflect upon our decision to

participate, our hope is that our spirits will be aligned with the divine Spirit who is always engaged in our lives and the world around us. Together with the Spirit, we can do amazing things.

One learning was that our mission field is wherever our people are engaged. We are training disciples of Jesus. And we don't live out our faith in discreet points in time, such as when we join in on an outreach project. Rather we live our faith every day of our lives with the people we live, or go to school with or work with. We live our faith with the people we come in contact with each and every day. And with the people God is bringing into our lives. We are a missional people of God.

Any description of our work as a parish cannot possibly incorporate the efforts of the disciples that gather here have made as individuals in our community this year. But as a parish we have committed to and engaged in missional activities.

Outside parish

This year's Missional activities: YWCA Day of Labor and Love which was really an extended weekend of missional engagement, Ramp ministry established by Bill Hobbs that is a part of the IOA, engagements of our members in multiple engagements around the community. We continue our efforts working with the Tinbridge Hill Community, raising 8,000 lbs of produce at Lynchburg Grows which continues to sustain the health and well-being of our community, Meals on Wheels, The Gateway, and Miriam's House. Our Day School is a missional connecting point with the community. Enrollment is full thanks to a talented director, Christie Hooper, dedicated Board, and gifted teachers. Over a third of those attending the Day School are members of St. John's. We are a parish engaged and committed to sharing the Good News of God in Christ with the community of Lynchburg.

Being a missional congregation is not only focused on our work outside the parish. One of the profound learnings of our MAP Task Force was that a missional engagement with the Holy Spirit included our relationships **inside** St. John's as well.

This year we have seen a revitalization of Christian formation for all ages. We have an energized Sunday Adult Forum in Magill Hall. But we have also

experienced changes in Christian formation for all ages with talented teams of teachers for adults and children. Christian formation for all ages is going well. I am deeply thankful to all of you who are teaching in many venues and ways. You never outgrow your ability to teach. Quote Kitty Robertson, “she teaches second and third graders on the dream team.” Teaching is a life-long endeavor, we never outgrow our ability to share the good news of Jesus with others. That is part of our Christian hope.

After years of discussion and hope, we instituted a Sunday evening service, Fellowship@5. A creative team of musicians and a casual atmosphere produce stunning liturgy which is followed by a delicious meal prepared by Marisa Catalano Jones. This service offers a casual evening alternative for worship.

With the help of Kim Glenn, Beth Knabel, and Dave Johnson, we have formed a Communication Committee. Working with our talented staff, they have revamped our website, added monitors sharing upcoming activities and upgraded our Facebook presence, and more.

We are welcoming more participation in our worship with new lay readers (13) and EM’s (11): were trained last Tuesday.

Mission trips are part of our identity: Last summer, a group of our senior high youth organized our first ever Senior High mission trip to the Boy’s Home in Covington. We also held our annual Middle School Mission Trip to Salter Path, NC.

Our focus has also been on stewardship, encouraging all to support the mission of Jesus here: this has meant expanding the Stewardship Committee, now just over 1.5 years old (chaired by Tripp Duerson) involvement led to our new parish brochure, (hold up) done by Sarah Williamson and her colleague, Amy Gallagher. Our Fall campaign was again chaired by Neal Davidson with Ricky Sterne as chair-elect. The results are very encouraging and more details will be shared at our Annual Meeting.

I mentioned our staff changes. Our beloved sexton, Murrell Dolsey retired last summer. But Murrell is an ongoing essential member of St. John’s. Since his retirement, he has joined a breakfast team and volunteers during the week as well. Murrell Dolsey is a person of deep faith and models a life of faithful discipleship to us.

Then in mid-year, Ginna Haske, our Assistant for Youth and Children's Ministry and Debbie Inge, our parish administrator, accepted new calls.

This presented us with yet more opportunity. And I must say that the Spirit has been with us and blessed us in our discernment bringing marvelous people to our staff team. And what a talented team they are!

We have now added: Bonnie Moeller, as our sexton who has become a vital presence with skills in abundance.

Neale Benjamin joined us as our new Parish Administrator. She brings her enthusiasm and talent to revamping our communications and so much more.

Sarah Lusk joined us in August as our new Assistant for Children's and Youth Ministry. She quickly set about expanding Children's ministries with our Pumpkin Party. And expanding youth activities of EYC with Grace Memorial's participation. She has revamped Sunday mornings for youth with Jesus and Java.

So, at St. John's, we follow a servant leader, not someone separated from the masses but integrally a part. A leader who came to seek out and save the lost. And we do to as we join the mission of God in the world.

Where are we headed in the year ahead? Some transitions are continuing: with Garden Angels and in other areas. There is a certain fluidity to all of life.

Our Mission Committee is planning our return to Holy Cross Anglican School in San Pedro, Belize. And again our Middle School Trip to Salter Path, NC where we engage in missional work in the Morehead City area.

There is another movement afoot that has arisen inside the parish to return to one of the core identities of St. John's. I can't tell you about some of the old things that are being made new, but I will say Boston Cream Pies. Yes, the Spirit is at work invigorating our lives together.

Are things perfect? No way. Do we need your help and support? Absolutely! We could not do this without you. Our work, our worship is ever fluid and totally unrepeatable. Every gathering here is a unique gathering with opportunities that may present themselves just once. We don't want to miss a one. You make all the difference and I am deeply grateful.