

Epiphany 7A, Feb. 20, 2011

Vestry, Rector's remarks

Lectons: Leviticus 19:1,2,9-18;Ps.119:33-41; 1Corin. 3:10,11,16-23; Matthew 5:38-48

Today's texts all tell us what it means to live a life of faith, not just for individuals but for the life of a community. For right choices, ethical behaviours, care for all blesses everyone. And surely, that must please God. This is what it means to live fully, not only on Sundays when we gather for worship, care, compassion, nourishment, and for the challenge to live beyond ourselves, but also to pay attention to what is broken in the world so that we can live as God intends.

Jesus extends himself in Matthew's gospel in such a way that his listeners sense that he is living beyond the Torah, beyond the minimum expectations of the law. This helps us understand that there is always more, a deeper, broader, wider way to live. He presents a cruciform life and invites those who would be his disciples into this wide open armed vulnerability that will transform them. Sometimes it is not what we have accomplished but rather the direction in which we are headed: reconciliation, nonviolence, radical forgiveness, divesting ourselves of excess and solidarity with those in need; these are opportunities for a lifetime.

Today we celebrate some directions we have taken that will continue to give us opportunities for ministry and mission.

- Increase in parishioner preaching and sharing – art and reflections during Holy Week
- Increase in music diversity – jazz, drumming, bells, bagpipes, soloists, dance workshop
- More aboriginal welcome and programming – June, dancers, feasts, beads, Tribes and Tents, storytellers, preachers, singers
- More open and welcome tables – Thanksgiving, Boxing Day, Meals for Cornerstone
- Continued stewardship focus – PAR enrolments up, pledges increased
- Youth focus – group here and participation with others, music at Pentecost, Stone Soup play followed by outreach with Christmas hamper, new play for Christmas Eve, Junkyard band at fall event, national youth drama “Roots among the Rocks”
- More shawls sheltering those who are going through difficult times in addition to prayer support in group and by individuals
- Increased stewardship of resources – cracked and broken windows replaced, new stoves and frig, new furnaces, new landscaped ramp for the spring; more groups using the building
- Membership increasing; 2 newcomer luncheons with sharing
- Financial stability with decreasing deficits over the three years while paying our fair share to the diocese
- Guests: Dr. Clare Sjolander, Dr. Bobby Moore, Col. John Fletcher, Reb Arie, Dr. Ahmad Yousef

- New committees – discernment group and anniversary committee
- Increased participation in life beyond parish: stewardship conference, prayer conference, Trinity Institute, Freedom Seder, National Church Silent Night project, diocesan synod
- New initiative for Lent – House Churches
- Public witness – clear cutting, gay pride parade, bus strike, pilgrimage walk
- Ongoing outreach in Lesotho, World Vision, Nursing home services including Memorials
- Celebration of Bev and Pat’s wedding

One would think that we could rest from our labours but why look to be relieved of what brings joy to God and to others. Where can we extend our witness? How can our service deepen our faith?

Your parish council mapped out a strategic and tactical plan and we are nearly finished with that two year focus; it is time for your input into our next directions. We’re going to be updating our website soon for ease of users and readers; we have already added a facebook page. Our public witness could grow in confronting unjust structures, teaching and formation, environmental activism. I can look at this parish and see so many of you adding to our common life: apple pies and bulletin boards, servers and greeters, early bird gifts for good stewardship, art and soul, nearly new, ways and means, the spirituality of the Hildgegard group, washing windows, cleaning the bathrooms, taking out the trash, delivering food to the nearby pantry. If you haven’t cooked one of the major meals and eaten at the big tables with the kids as servers and helpers, there is more to come.

In March we will begin discussions with the five parishes in this deanery that are situated very close geographically. Conversations about common ministry and shared resources are important for our future; models may change.

While a year ago we were looking at a Montessori School in our ground floor, this year we have grounded ourselves in new ways. We’ll need help to use our gardens, labryinthe and outdoor altar in more ways. We’ll need your help to continue to invite more voices from our community, listening carefully for ways to love our neighbours. Today is a good day, a perfect day to learn to love as God intends. How shall we take our Torah obligations into the wisdom and wideness of Jesus?

Amen+

The Rev. Dr. Linda Privitera