

Celebrating, Working and Waiting

The Interim Dean's Annual Address

St. Peter's Episcopal Cathedral in Helena, Montana

January 21, 2018

In the name of God: Father Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Good Morning!

It is a privilege and also a surprise to be standing in the pulpit of St. Peter's Cathedral in Helena, Montana preaching an Annual Address! Coming here just last month as your interim dean, would have been the furthest thing from my mind a year ago, but God is full of surprises. Thank you for welcoming Sherry and me so quickly and kindly into this community.

It is truly an honor to be here and I would like to take this pulpit time to celebrate many of the strengths of this community, to talk about some of the challenges we face and to emphasize our mutual ministry, while we wait for the selection and arrival of the next Dean. I title this address, **"Celebrating, Working and Waiting."**

I begin with the Gospel which we just heard from the opening chapter of Mark. Jesus begins his Galilean ministry, proclaiming the good news of God and immediately calls his first four disciples: Peter and Andrew, James and John. Mark tells us that "immediately they left their nets and followed Jesus." The word 'immediately' is used in Mark some 40 times! Jesus is in a hurry. He identifies the first four on his team and the church begins!

Just stop and think of it. Think of what Jesus started 2000 years ago on the shore of that lake! Think of how those first disciples made more disciples. Think of how Jesus' preaching, teaching and healing spread from a small village in Galilee to every island and continent, to every race and nation, to every language and culture all over God's world. Jesus came for everyone.

We are among the current generation of Jesus' disciples in one part of the universal church, in one branch of Christendom joined together with all the other saints who have witnessed to Christ in their own generation. And we all trace our faith back to this Jesus who began his ministry by calling four disciples.

What we do here, what we say here, what we believe here, what we profess here is of the utmost importance. We give thanks to God who has called us into such a broad, deep and universal Church.

So, the first thing we are doing today is giving thanks for being a part of a wider church which established this community a century and half ago and which gives us the wonderful privilege of witnessing to Christ in our own generation.

I am so grateful for Bishop Brookhart's invitation to come here as you search for a new dean. Thanks to the hard work and leadership of Monica Berner on the search committee, the search is progressing well, the committee is doing its diligence and they are ready to interview some excellent candidates.

Next, I want to thank the staff which has made it so much easier for me to settle in here. We are all so fortunate to have Donna Gleaves administering the cathedral. You cannot run a church without the likes of Donna. Not only does she know the congregation well, she is also knowledgeable about the diocese. I was amazed at all of the social concerns she oversees as listed in the Annual Report. I am so appreciative of her giving me any heads up over who needs a call or what needs to get done. And if truth be told, she deserves a medal for enduring my pathetic computer skills. I think Donna is amazed at how I could rise to the heights of interim dean of St. Peter's cathedral with so little to offer, but she has done miracles, especially with my power point on Sunday afternoons! In addition to Donna, I am also grateful for our other deacons, Rick and John, who assist at all the services as well as Rick's detailed expertise with the finances and John's attention to pastoral care.

I want to thank Sara Medley for her extraordinary leadership as Senior Warden in this challenging year, keeping so many things on track while overseeing the Chapter. We are very pleased to report that we have a full slate of candidates for the Chapter with new members offering both their gifts and their enthusiasm for the coming year. I am grateful for the chapter's gift of a warm blanket for Christmas. I wear the blanket like a chasuble every time I look out my front window and see white!

I speak for all of us when thanking our next senior warden, Sara Berg, who stepped up to organize the children's Christmas Pageant on Christmas Eve. When I arrived the first of December, there was a question as to whether there would be a Christmas Pageant. By Christmas Eve it was the best attended service of the four we had that day!

Many thanks are due to Dick Brown and his superb leadership of the choir, the fruits of which we enjoy every Sunday, but which was especially uplifting on Christmas Eve. We are also so appreciative of the talents of Sue Brookhart at the organ, not only in her accompaniment of the choir and congregation, but also of

her splendid preludes and postludes. The worship life of this congregation is magnificent. And, of course, we would not have such a well-organized worship life if it were not for the altar guild, the acolytes, the lay readers, the chalice bearers and the lay eucharistic ministers who assist with their gifts and offering their pastoral care. We don't have time to thank so many other on this Annual Meeting Sunday, but we should recognize Lesley and George Powell, who are downstairs, cooking our breakfast.

Now I want address some challenges which you have faced this past year. You have had a difficult year. You lost a beloved Dean who brought a broad array of gifts to this community and left a rich, faithful legacy. As sad as her departure was for you, Heidi gave you a very unified and fruitful ministry. Such a legacy will serve you well in the calling of a new dean. This community has a deep faith and a stable history with many members having served this cathedral for generations.

But you had a tough year, losing your assistant, then having Paul Bresnahan arrive, only to lose him for health reasons a few months later. You could say that this year, you have been in a wilderness experience, grieving over the loss of your dean, then feeling disoriented and uncertain, waiting for a new dean to arrive.

My only word to all of you who are living in this time of uncertainty, is to be sure to do your ministries, to keep up with your commitments and to support your leadership which is charged with taking you through this transition. There is plenty of work to be done. This community has plenty to do regardless of when the next dean arrives. The most important commitment is for each member to be present for worship each Sunday and at the high holy days. Each member has their ministry to do. The better we do our ministries, the better off the parish will be when the candidates arrive and you discern the person, God is calling here to lead you into the next chapter of your life together.

At the Annual Meeting there will be some very good news financially and there will also be some challenges. The financial results for 2017 are very encouraging. In spite of a difficult year when things can fall through the cracks, the budget has held. But going forward into 2018 and beyond we will need some growth in order to support the variety of ministries required of this cathedral.

One of our highest priorities which we do need to address is the Sunday School. We have a good number of children in the community but there needs to be a new leader who loves young people and who will organize programs in Christian formation for all ages. That said, it cannot be overstated that it is the

responsibility of the parents to get their children here and to help the leadership develop this essential ministry for the future growth of this community.

Speaking of education and Christian formation, I want to thank those of you for attending the course on “The Life of Jesus”. Your enthusiasm indicates how important people here view adult formation and I suspect this will be a priority you will be looking for in the next dean.

This is a faithful, hospitable and broadly gifted congregation with a rich legacy. Its membership does extraordinary things throughout this capital city and beyond. As you open a new chapter in your life together with a new dean, please remember that the ministry of St. Peter’s cathedral is the whole congregation not just its clergy. May the Holy Spirit continue to guide the minds of those who will choose a new dean, so that you will receive a faithful pastor who will care for its people and equip you for your ministries. Amen

The Very Rev. Graham Smith, Interim Dean