

Good morning. It is a beautiful morning and Jane and I am so glad to finally be with you all again. It has been quite a while since that first week in February.

Much has happened since then. It is amazing how slow time goes, at least by human standards, after a new call from God has been recognized until we can get to this Sunday, filled with anticipation and excitement. So many people to get to know. So many relationships to build.

I want to start this morning by passing on a message. It is a message from The Church of the Redeemer in Greenville. They send their welcome and their blessings. They are wonderful people who recognize that in the broader sense, we are all on God's mission together. And, although Redeemer has now begun their search for their next Rector, they find joy in knowing that there is now a link between them and us here at St. Peter's, as Jane and I begin our time with you. From this day forward, the Church of the Redeemer in Greenville, SC and St. Peter's Cathedral in Helena, Montana will have a common connection, just like the other congregations of previous Deans have, as God continues to arrange faithful assets in our time to bring his message and love to the world. You know, if you think about it, it really is an amazing thing how it all works. Congregations, reaching across the country, sharing themselves all for the end goal of sharing the Good News of God's love and truth within a world that finds itself struggling without it.

You know, a first sermon message can be a challenge. There is so much to say and so little time to say it. There is a great deal ahead for us. Our common life together, the ongoing ministries that have been so faithfully embraced at St. Peter's over the years, new ministries that we haven't even imagined yet. It truly is an exciting time. And that is not to say that the times leading up to this day have not been exciting also. No doubt, they were. But today we begin to write a new chapter, God begins to write a new chapter, at this cathedral. And it will be a future full of stories of lives touched, worship embraced, possibilities discovered and achieved, promises made and kept. Together we will care for each other, welcome new families, hopefully welcome back those who have been absent for a while, and then together bear witness to God's amazing presence in this place. I'm excited and I hope you are too.

But as we enter this new chapter, it seems to me that there is a question that must be answered. It is a question every congregation must answer. It is a question that we find throughout Scripture but there is one story, in particular, that comes to mind. It is a story that comes from the first chapter of the Gospel of John and it ties to what Paul wrote to the church in

Corinth in our Epistle this morning. It deals with light, and darkness, and identity. I'm sure that you'll remember it. It goes like this:

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.”

Did you catch the question that we need to answer? It is an ongoing question that the world has for us. The question they are asking is, “Who are you?”

It is an important question to know the answer to, especially today when more and more people have less and less experience and understanding about us and what we really believe and what our faith really teaches. Truth be told, that same thing might be said in places within the church.

John the Baptist knew himself well. He knew why he was there. He knew that he came to testify to the light. In his day he had been sent to point to the light in their time of darkness. He had no illusions about being the Messiah. He wasn't and he knew it and he said it. He wasn't Elijah either who was supposed to return prior to the coming of the Messiah. And he wasn't the prophet, who many of those asking thought would be Jeremiah returning to bring back the container of manna and the Arc of the Covenant which he had hidden from the Babylonians.

John wasn't any of those, but he did know exactly who he was. He was a voice crying out. He was a voice declaring light in the midst of darkness. He was the Baptizer who used the outward and visible sign of water to bring people into a renewed relationship with God until Christ would usher in a new baptism of fire through the Holy Spirit.

And today that same question is often being asked of us. It may seem silly, but people want to know who we are? And we need to be able to tell them...directly, without hesitation.

So, what will you say? Who are *you*? Are you simply your job title or your city and state of origin, or the number of children you have, or maybe the color you are or the income you make? Or are you something more than all that?

What will St. Peter's say? We together need to be able to answer. Are we simply a social service organization, or a non-profit tax category, or a human designed organization for good works? Or are we more than those things offering something beyond human design?

People really do want to know. They need to know. They are watching and it cannot be a secret. Our neighbors, and our friends and those with whom we work, and our family want and need to know. Most importantly, our children and grandchildren are watching us. They really need to know and to see something different from the world around them. A world of division, and anger, and self-centeredness, and accumulation. They are all watching and seeking a path for their lives. To what or to whom are we going to invite them to, through our lives and our example?

Answering that question for those who are watching is not as hard as you might think. You see, the truth is, you don't need a degree in theology to answer that question. You don't need a title like "The Rev." or "The Very Rev." or "The Right Rev." or "CEO" or "President." We don't even need an impressive resume or be Captain of the football team or head of the debate club. We just need a faith and then an authentic life based on that faith that embraces and reflects the one who came and will be returning.

The world is watching. They will see how we allocate our time and spend our money and what we serve. Our neighbors are watching. They will see whether we divide or embrace, whether we are full of animosity or joy, whether we live what we say we believe. Those we work with, or go to school with, or socialize with are all watching. Most importantly, our children are watching and wondering who are they to become.

So, on this first Sunday of our next chapter I would like to invite us on the continuing journey. It starts as a short trip from your pew to this altar as we each draw near to God in order to be in communion with him and each other. Then the rest of the journey will take the rest of our earthly lives as we strive to bring the light of Christ out beyond these walls. It is simply who we are called to be together. Loving, truthful, obedient, understanding. Bringing unity instead of division, clarity instead of confusion, wholeness out of brokenness, light to the darkness.

So, when people ask who you are, when the world asks who we are, when our children wonder who they are meant to be, here is what we tell them. We tell them that we are like the one crying out, embracing the Christ as Lord, bringing light to the world.

That is what is truly exciting.

Amen.