



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

November 15, 2009

Pentecost 24 - The End of Things

We are now coming to the end of the liturgical year. Next week is the last Sunday of Pentecost when we not only Kirk the tartans but celebrate Christ the King. Today focuses our attention on the second coming of Christ and the end of things as we know them. But it is not just the end of something that our focus is given, because in our Christian belief when something ends there is always a new beginning.

When we are baptized we give up the old way of living and begin a new way of living as guided by our baptismal covenant.

When we are forgiven we amend our way of life and do not do the things that have caused hurt or pain any more.

Ultimately when we die we simply step out of this body into the new body of eternal life. Our whole existence in Christianity is woven with endings but along with those endings always come new beginnings of new hope and new life.

In Jan. 2004 St. Johns had a painful ending as some folks made the choice to not only leave St. Johns but to leave the Episcopal Church. They left because they were angry at our bishop, our diocese and the national church. St Johns was left with a remnant of around 50 very faithful people who were not sure what the future held except that they knew that there would be a future, and because of our trust in god we knew the future would be different but much brighter.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Established in 1847

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 info@stjohnsky.com www.stjohnsky.com



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In June of 2004 I was appointed as priest in charge. We had a very small but active congregation, a few children, a church that was not well known in the larger community, and very little money.

St. Johns today is a very different place to what it was in 2004. There is not a day when there is not something happening. We have kids running all over and it is wonderful. Our average Sunday attendance is a record number in the life of St. Johns.

There is not one floor, wall or ceiling in our buildings that has not been painted carpeted or renewed. We still struggle with money but tell me a family that doesn't. Yet our bills have been paid and the lights are on. We are known in the community not just for fish fries but a place that will welcome and accept showing the face of Christ.

In all this I bought a home on the river and married Judi and at my age in ordained ministry, I was looking towards retirement here at St. Johns.

We came together at difficult times in our lives and together we healed. Our life is now vibrant and healthy. It is not without disagreement or struggle but that's ok because sometimes only by the struggle do we determine God's will for us.

In my contentment here at St. Johns, in my incredible enjoyment of ministering with you, in my love of being your priest and pastor and friend, in my incredible pride in all that you do for St. Johns and for Christ, in all of that I began to have a stirring in my soul that my work was done here. And my

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struggle began. And it has been a struggle. At times it has been a fight and at times it has been a war.

Into this mix came a church in Oklahoma.

In the Episcopal Church, all the priests have profiles that are kept on computer in New York. When a church becomes vacant the profile of that church gets matched with the profiles of priests who fit the bill of what they are looking for in a priest. The church narrows it down to about 20 priests and usually writes them a letter inviting them to be part of their search process as a candidate. Priests get these letters all the time and I have a standard letter of thanks but no thanks that I send to churches that sent me letters. Yet back in July I received a letter that struck me differently. In reading their history 6 years ago their average attendance was around 180. Today it is 50. They have few kids, and very little money, but they have a very faithful remnant. And I responded to that letter because I knew I had to. Over the last 5 months I have been involved in that search process yet have been more intentional about God's will for my ministry and my life.

This has been made more difficult because of you. The community of faith of St. Johns.

In these last few months, I have had several affirmations of the health and vitality of St. Johns. I see reading club and EYC, I see Pastoral Care, and men's club, I see inreach and outreach, I see Christian formation and music, I see an annual report that only touches the tip of the iceberg that is the way of life that Christ has called you to and how many of you have responded to that call.

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Last week Donna preached about moving from security to faith.

On Thursday night I was called by the vestry of St. Michaels Norman Oklahoma to become there next rector and I accepted that call.

I accepted it with the security that St. Johns is a healthy vibrant community of faith

I accepted it with faith that my gifts of ministry can help St. Michaels become what God intends them to become.

At the end of every service I offer the prayer that includes the words and our work is done. I know that speaks of our resurrection but I believe that my work is done here at St. Johns.

But your work isn't.

The life that God has called you to will continue to grow and to deepen.

Only this year did we put a sign outside that says the Episcopal Church welcomes you. You. Anybody. You.

That has not always been true of St. Johns but I believe it is a bold statement of where God has brought us.

You will always have an incredibly special place in both mine and Judi's heart. This would be so much easier if I did not love you. But I do and my prayer is that you continue to love one another, make

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the door wider for all people, as you continue to live out your baptismal covenant showing the face of Christ to all people.

From the bottom of my heart thank you for allowing me to share this part of your story of the community of faith of St. Johns.

Thank you.

Amen

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