



Hope and Service

We are a people who live in hope. This is no more true than in Eastertide, when we see the resurrection from multiple angles: an invitation from the Lord to one of his followers to place his hand in his side, a walk to Emmaus with two disciples, the pervasive image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Typically, the hope the church offers is oriented toward the end of things; this orientation is particularly true when the work of the church has been curtailed, as it has during the CORONA-19 virus precautions we have been taking. In fact, the only mission-oriented activity that has been left to us has been our food programs, the breakfast and supper we serve on Sundays, to the homeless and marginalized in our city.

For completely understandable reasons, many of the volunteers who have staffed these programs have been unable to participate. When I recently pointed this situation out to Bishop Stokes, he and his wife Susan made the trip to St. Paul's to help with our evening food program. It was good to have him with us and the day was, I believe, providential. It was the Second Sunday after Easter, sometimes called "Thomas Sunday" in the church, because we hear the

identical story from John's gospel each year on that date. There is fear, you may remember, in the upper room that day, the Day of the Resurrection, where we can imagine the disciples locked together, the only sound the breathing of these eleven men, listening for footfalls on the steps. When Jesus comes and stands among them, he offers them his peace and breathes the Holy Spirit on them, and they rejoice in his presence; but when Thomas joins them the following week, he doesn't want stories. He wants the real thing before him, which is precisely what Jesus offers him and precipitates from him the most direct confession of faith in the entire gospel, "My Lord and my God"! It was both because of Thomas's skepticism and his remarkable affirmation of faith that all deacons in my home diocese of Atlanta were ordained on his feast day, December 21. The diocese wanted its priests to "prove it" in an increasingly skeptical and cynical world.

When the time came for a Celebration of New Ministry at St. Paul's (my "installation" date this past December), it was important to me that I had this same date. We have nothing to prove, having been the source of physical and

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spiritual nourishment for many over these last decades, but we do have hope to offer the world, hope that we are all in this together. I cannot speak for anyone but myself, but I am convinced that my salvation is bound-up with that of every person who comes through our gates, that we are offering hope through relationship. If there is something I most mourn during the past several weeks, it is being able to sit with our guests and find out how things are going for them; handing someone a meal, however helpful it may be on a given day, is not a substitute for looking them in the eye and hearing how they are. I will be grateful when whatever we call "normality" returns and I can resume that time with many of them.

Until then, we have our work and each other. However joyful it has been to see your faces on the computer, I cannot wait until we are all in the sanctuary again. But I am prepared to wait in hope and am willing to take Paul at his word, that "if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it in patience" (Rom. 8:24). In the meantime, I am glad that we can offer hope to our guests and friends, hope greater than anything we can put in a Styrofoam box.

Hope and Technology

Although I can talk all day long about the saints, church history and liturgy (I enjoy them all), I will confess that virtual worship has been a growing edge for me. I often say that I missed that day in seminary. The fact is that they made no attempt to teach us how to integrate technology into worship, maybe because it was rudimentary enough at the time as to be useless; it can also lead to some frightful consequences in liturgical traditions. Through communications and "town halls" with the diocese, I have come to understand that there is no correct way of doing it and, having established something like a rhythm, I am reluctant to change it; I will own (and Kelly will confirm) that it has been a journey for me. When this is over, I don't believe that I will ever use "Zoom" (now a verb for me) in the same way. I have tried to use a variety of different tools in the hope of meeting the needs of as many of us as possible. Again, when this is over, you will have me in the flesh, for good or ill.

It has been interesting to me, speaking to colleagues working in very different environments, how fascinating the technology can be, despite its limitations. Young people appear to understand something about it I haven't always been able to



see; I have had a Facebook account hacked some years ago, which had me selling certain items that caused a lot of consternation among the people I was serving. Until recently, formatting newsletters and orders of service has been a challenge for me. I am helpless before the collection of remotes sitting in the T.V. room. Yet I have discovered, through the help of a pandemic that no one wanted, that facility with technology is no longer an asset but a requirement these days. What is not, emphatically, is a substitute for person-to-person interaction.

What it has also taught me is the value of trust. At times, I have wondered if I am offering enough or the right things in terms of public worship and education; what I have learned, so far, is that people will take what they want or need from these forums and that I have to rely on some candor

from the people of St. Paul's. That you have been supportive of my efforts (we are learning to tame the music gremlins), has been a source of deep gratitude for me. I have also come to know that, across the diocese, all of us are struggling with the same problems with roughly the same equipment. Before the arrival of my son, I remember reading Dr. Spock's book for new parents, which begins, "You know more than you think you do." As a relative newbie in this business, I retain both the hope I need and an awareness of my limitations—Dr. Spock's book is about the length of a Russian novel.

I used to joke that the reason this was a challenge for me was that, in another lifetime, I made a living with a piece of wood with metal on it. That has stopped for me these past months. What has not stopped is a new appreciation for flexibility in our common life, as it is our sense of community that has been at stake. We have a few more months of these circumstances and I appreciate, in equal measure, the indulgence and candor with which people have talked to me about the church in these times. Like the early church, we have learned we can adapt. And like the church fathers, we have learned that waiting is something we can all do, given the hope we see at the end.

Hope and Camp Faith

One of my fondest memories of my first months at St. Paul's was the beginning of Camp Faith. Clearly, it was a long time in planning, but it also came together unbelievably quickly. Mitchell and many of the Morgans, as well as Andre, Aaron and more people than I can name were incredibly hardworking and unflappable in the face of all that ninety energetic grade-schoolers could throw at them; I have rarely seen anyone work as tirelessly as Mitchell and Val did to make it a success. Because my office was directly below the dining room, I would have had to be deaf to miss the excitement, yet the kids were incredibly well-behaved and respectful. I will confess that I was one of those clerics who used to complain about the one-week VBS I ran for thirty kids each summer. No longer.

What we are in now, of course, is a cycle of waiting. Camp had been scheduled to begin on July 7 and, as I said in the letters I sent to potential donors earlier in the week, it is anyone's



guess whether we will actually be open at that time. The governor has been very conservative, of necessity, in his efforts to keep large gatherings closed and the bishop has followed this lead in determining what can happen on church property. Absent this guidance, of course, we still would not want to put anyone's health at risk. But because we live in hope, we have to plan appropriately and so have begun soliciting funds for Camp Faith 2020.

Since we are all caught in this same dynamic of waiting, we are counting on potential donors to be as supportive as they have been in the past, but the pandemic has created even more unknowns in that area. So the contingencies are as follows: we have some flexibility in starting camp slightly later than the original target date. If we and the parents are still unsure about the environment, all funds collected will be applied toward Camp Faith

2021. We are still committed to having camp this year and are raising funds accordingly. It will take approximately \$30,000 to fund everything at existing levels, with half that amount designated toward staff and counselor salaries, a camp manager and a registrar.

If it seems very early to be talking about camp, please remember that it is already Eastertide; we will need to be making some decisions shortly, with the help of our usual partners and vendors. When our common life was shut down, it happened very fast; we have to be able to act prudently but quickly when and if the opportunity arises. If you are able to contribute this year, please know that we will make the wisest decisions we can with the available information. Thank you for your consideration and your prayers during this cycle of waiting and hope.

Stewardship!

Dear Members and Friends of St. Paul's Episcopal Church,

I hope you and your families are staying safe and well. As a church, we are following all state and federal guidelines to ensure the safety of our members.

As we continue to quarantine, we are reminding everyone not to forget their commitment they made earlier in the year to support the church via your tithes and by your pledges. You can do this by mailing your tithes or your pledges to the church at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 1551 Camden, New Jersey 08101.

It is important to support the church with your tithes and pledges to ensure continuation of the ministry of the church.

Thanks in Advance,

Stewardship Committee,

T. Patsy Morgan

Baptisms!

Lest we lose sight of one of our great joys and responsibilities as a community of faith, I wanted to remind everyone that Pentecost is only a month away. While we do not know when we will be allowed to worship in our sanctuary again, it would be helpful to know if there are candidates for baptism so we can prepare for them. If you know of someone who would like to receive the sacrament of baptism, please let me know. Thank you!

Fr. Mark

Flowers!

A huge "Thank you" to Mitchell and Patsy Morgan for putting flowers in our front garden! They look lovely and are a wonderful reminder of the beauty of the world, even in difficult times. My hope is that we talk more in the coming months of what we can do in our space to make it more inviting for all. Until then, blessings on the Morgans for their initiative in beautifying our neighborhood