



St. Paul's Church

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Renew in *these* your *servants* the covenant you have made with *them* at *their* Baptism. Send *them* forth in the power of that Spirit to perform the service you set before *them*; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen. BCP, p.418

To be candid, this is the sacrament in our tradition that causes the most confusion. Whether we think of it as renewal of commitments made at baptism, the acknowledgement of a mature affirmation of the faith or the sealing of these young people in a new relationship with God and the church (it is probably all three) it is not always clear why we have this rite. The normative age boundaries of it have changed, with candidates taking on this new role at a slightly older age than the thirteen-or-so that was common when I was young.

Confirmations and Celebrations

I still believe that it is important for all of us as witnesses because it reminds us that the Christian life is a process; we are renewed by the Holy spirit, sealed and sent forth in service to a broken world. That work, of course, is central to all our lives as Christians and we need to hear it and affirm it for ourselves as we celebrate this passage for Arianah, Justus and Nikole.

The preparation for this time was more of a challenge than I had ever experienced and it had nothing to do with these young people, all of whom are wonderful. Zoom, I'm continually told, is a useful tool for many things, but for teaching it presented limits about which we had to be creative. I am a believer that we use our entire bodies to pray, to give thanks and to communicate with one another. As I watched Kelly struggle with the platform to teach, I realized that we would be more limited in what we could do, but I am still proud to present these young people. It has

been a pleasure to know them better through our time together.

The confirmations, of course are not the only part of the day. We have been fortunate indeed to have had so many faithful people helping with our ministries throughout the pandemic and this will be our chance to celebrate their work. If we needed a better example of those who have been sent forth "in the power of the spirit to perform the service set before them," we need look no further than these faithful people who have offered their selves, their souls and bodies in a deeply uncertain health climate.

Because we put all of ourselves into our ministries, we need a time to celebrate. What Nikole, Justus and Arianah will offer us is a look at the future of our work, or the passage of our work into new hands. We have the example of these young men and women in a time of passage as a window onto our collective lives in the years to come. I believe it will be a hopeful one indeed and one that you will join me in celebrating.

-Fr. Mark

Deacon's Corner

I am inspired to write a continuation of the meditation Fr. Mark wrote this week, the one about the call to love...

Last month, my son and his family came to visit, a stop with us on the way to a family wedding. With them was baby Lennon; I was meeting her for the first time.

My heart filled with awe and love, flowing over, as I watched my son care for his family. Even at the start of some small distress—hunger, a wet diaper, cry—Lennon was gathered up, fed, changed, held close and rocked until she returned to a place of peace and comfort. When she cried out hard, loud and long, she was held and rocked for as long as it took to soothe her. Her cry for help, for comfort, attention, even if my son didn't know exactly what was distressing his little one, met her where she was, and who loved her more than any description might provide.

I delighted in watching all this, from the place of grandparent-hood, a beautiful place from which to view. I remember, when I was a young parent, feeling so overwhelmed, wondering how I would be able to manage it all. Yet now, looking back on it all, I am grateful for those days with my own children and having the opportunity to witness it again. Most of us don't remember our own infant days, we don't remember how our parents cared for us. I am grateful as well for witnessing God's hand in these moments with my son and his family as an example of God's love for us, how we are, in our own distress, in our cries in prayer, even if our needs are difficult to articulate, held and cared for, gathered up, not only as individuals, but as the community of God's church, God's people, God's children.

The Rev. Jeannie Marcucci, Deacon

Books

The Sum of Us Heather McGhee

In the subtitle of McGhee's book, "What racism costs everyone and how we can prosper together," the overwhelming sense is the needless cost all of us have paid as a result of systemic racism, Black, brown and white together. Without giving short shrift to the breathtaking suffering that Black people have endured since the beginning of Reconstruction, through redlining, "drained-pool" politics (if whites only cannot swim then no one can), the duplicity toward people of color in the mortgage collapse of 2007-2010 and the pollution allegedly confined to black areas but affecting us all, McGhee makes clear that the entire country is perpetuating its own suffering.

The heart of this idea is predicated on a "zero-sum" view of societal benefits, that what benefits Black people will negatively impact the lives of whites, regardless of class or background. After detailed argument about how these policies, most ongoing and many intensifying, she argues that a way forward that benefits the entire country (indeed the world), if we adopt inclusionary policies over discriminatory ones. For all the discouraging statistics (McGhee is meticulous about figures and documentation), her vision is ultimately hopeful. In the end she says, "What I've seen on my journey is that (the coming demographic changes) are the *fulfillment* of America. What they say is a threat is actually our country's salvation—for when a nation founded on a belief in racial hierarchy truly rejects that belief, then and only then will we have discovered a New World."

I cannot recommend this book highly enough.

Fr. Mark

Value

We don't have to be "successful," only valuable. We don't have to make money, only a difference, and particularly in the lives society counts least and puts last.

William Sloane Coffin

There is something about the fall and the beginning of what, in any other year, we would call the start of our "programs," that forces me to evaluate what we are doing and how it aligns with what we believe to be God's purpose. If you are like me, that purpose appears clouded by restrictions on what we think we can do, but, in St. Paul's fashion, we have done it anyway. When things are happening as we had planned (about 60-70% of the time) we are able to serve our guests indoors in a safe environment, offer medical care and some answers about the bureaucratic situations our guests have to navigate through the presence of Rick and Leah, our two social work interns. Sundays are busy but purposeful and, with God's help, we are actually making things easier for the people who come through our doors.

The distinction that Coffin makes between successful and valuable is a helpful one, at least for me. Having grown up in an achievement-oriented household and having siblings in very different tax brackets from my own, I have wondered what making a difference looks like, especially when I ask the Rutgers

students what has drawn them to this work; the single most common answer I hear is their desire to make a difference. Although I don't push them very hard on this response, but I suspect it has to do with making the lives of the people we see a little easier, to reinforce the idea that we are all human and all deserve the same consideration as children of God. What they appear to know, almost instinctively, is that any difference on a small scale has to happen before we can expect large-scale change. We have to learn something first-hand about being human before we can learn to create systems that treat all of us humanely.

The difference between success and value is not always easy to make. If you are like me, we confront it all the time, not only because success has some easy metrics—salary, compensation and its trappings, while value is famously hard to define. When we do something of value, we say it is usually outside the routines we create for ourselves and the pressures we feel to be successful. But the whole idea of value is based on the idea that we were irreplaceable from the time

we were a thought in the mind of God. When we offer ourselves to our neighbor, we are acknowledging that they also have that value, indeed that there is a mutual interdependence in that value. It is simply our job to make the value of all as clear as we can.

When I meet with people and wish them well, I don't hope for their success, at least not in the terms we typically use. In deed, I know many people whose success has done them a lot of harm. What I wish is that they will see the value they have, free of charge, in the economy of God's salvation. They are indeed irreplaceable, as are the people they serve, and our only job is to make the world a better place by making the invaluable souls we see as transparent as we can.

Fr. Mark

Pledges

Please be mindful that we would like to have all pledge commitments for 2022 in by November 7. Please let us know if you need a pledge card. And do not forget to keep your pledges current. Thank you!

Confirmands

Please pray for our confirmands: Justus Morgan, Arianah Eustace and Nikole Morgan. please also plan to attend their confirmation on October 17!