

A Future Not Our Own

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.
We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer fully expresses our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
We lay foundations that will need further development.
We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.
We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,
An opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.
We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of a future not our own.

In memory of +Oscar Romero

+Kenneth Edward Untener

St. Thomas' Episcopal Church

Vernon, New Jersey



**Celebration and Closure of the
Mission: October 30, 2016**

Thank you for being with us this afternoon at the final service for St. Thomas'. Among you are the faithful remnant who committed to carry out this ministry following the decision to close. There are some present today who have only recently left us, perhaps in anger or frustration. There are former members and officers; former clergy and clergy families; friends from other congregations. Greetings, and peace, to you in our Lord Jesus Christ.

A mission of the Diocese of Newark, our vision over the last few years has been to reflect the radical hospitality of God. By the end of our time here, more explicitly, we tried to welcome and affirm those of diverse economic reality; ethnicity; family status; sexual or gender identity; physical, mental or emotional ability; legal issues; or social standing. We like to think our red doors indicated a place of asylum for all.



Most—though not all—in leadership were able to see Bp. Beckwith's "tsunami of change" half a decade ago. We saw the falling attendance, shrinking population, shifting cultural norms, increased expenses, and several distinct groupings of "members" with various explanations for why we existed. Tired of struggling to merely survive without any clear understanding of why: starting in 2014, Executive Committee made a series of courageous—some say outrageous and irresponsible—choices. We decided to simply do the mission of God and find joy again.

We wanted to live in communion, rather than just take communion; to be driven by mission rather than maintenance, grace rather than entitlement, discipleship rather than membership. If, in the off chance those stances saved us: fine. If not, we would die doing the ministry of Jesus, instead of as a fraternal lodge at prayer who obsessed over its own survival. Whether we lived or died: *we were the Lord's possession.*

The Kingdom of God came near. Anyone involved in a church knows change is difficult. If you had asked on Christmas Eve 2015, many would have said we would make it. But the loss of our major tenant (Footprints Montessori) and a quarrelsome Annual Meeting took its toll. In the end, clearly, we simply could not evolve quickly enough to sustain a 21st century church.



We leave an amazing legacy. We unashamedly proclaimed the Gospel. Our Hiker Hostel sheltered thousands of Appalachian Trail thru hikers. In the off season, we hosted homeless families through Family Promise of Sussex County. We had a food pantry. We provided tutoring and counseling. The



recovery community considered us a safe place. We rented space to a Montessori school. All sorts of folks who needed asylum found a refuge here. We engaged the community around their own spiritual issues. We blessed pets—and bears. We commemorated fallen firefighters. We educated people on end of life issues with Funeral Consumers Alliance. We hosted musicians and acting troupes. Toward the last, we took in a surprising number of new, somewhat non-traditional members. We learned a lot about tattoos and piercings. The words "blue haired church lady" began to evoke an entirely new image. "You visited me in prison" was no longer an abstract biblical concept. Children wandered God's house in noisy awe and wonder.

We thank Bishop Beckwith for giving us this chance, providing us with a vision for localized mission, as well as being prophetic about the social and cultural changes that would likely overtake us. We were blessed to have the Reverend Ginny Dinsmore, Diocesan

Coordinator for Missional Ministry, walk with us for the last couple of years, sharing her insight and affirmation. And, we thank the Reverend Canon Gregory Jacobs for his wisdom and realism.

The Executive Committee performed faithfully under grim and bizarrely challenging circumstances; we praise God for their ministry:

Kathy More, <i>Warden</i>	Robert Winter
Ginny Mohr, <i>Warden</i>	Terry Taylor, <i>former warden</i>
George Mindos, <i>Treasurer</i>	Nancy Wiedbrauk, <i>former warden</i>
Paulette Beer	Doc Whitaker, <i>Priest-in-Charge</i>

We wish to acknowledge our musicians this afternoon. The last remaining members of our choir are being joined this day by several former members and guests, as well as a former organist and choir director. For this service, you will hear:

David C. Christensen, *Organist and Choir Director*
 Mary Rose Kummerfeldt, *Guest Organist and Choir Director*



and choristers
 George Mindos
 Ginny Mohr
 Kay Hamrick
 Mindy Wiedbrauk
 Paulette Beer
 Kathy Moore
 Mike Wiedbrauk

You may notice the sparseness of the nave and altar. St. Thomas' interior has always had a bare Trappist simplicity. But now, many of our church objects have already been "re-homed" to other churches and non-profits. Others will disappear following this service. The sacramental life of these articles—as well as our own lives—will continue. We have made almost sixty article bequests to date. So, too, our missionaries have created their own diaspora, joining with many disparate congregations. Like the risen Lord himself: we will be everywhere. Thanks be to God.

This invocation, led by our choir, emerged simultaneously in the early 19th century as both an African slave spiritual and an Appalachian shape note hymn. While the author is unknown and unknowable, we have Alison Krauss to thank for its restoration into our modern consciousness.

Down To The River To Pray

F C F

As I went down to the ri-ver to pray

C Bb F

sru-dy-ing a-bout that good old way and

C F Bb F

who shall wear the star-ry crown Good Lord show me the way

C F Bb F

Oh, sis-ters let's go down, let's go down, come on down.
 Oh, bro-thers let's go down, let's go down, come on down.
 Oh, fa-thers let's go down, let's go down, come on down.
 Oh, mo-thers let's go down, let's go down, come on down.
 Oh, sin-ners let's go down, let's go down, come on down.

C F Bb F

down to the ri-ver to pray.
 down to the ri-ver to pray.

Hymn in Procession

396 AURELIA

S. S. WESLEY, 1864



THE Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation
By water and the word:
From heaven he came and sought her
To be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought her,
And for her life he died.

2 Elect from every nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation,
One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy Name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses,
With every grace endued.

3 Though with a scornful wonder
Men see her sore opprest,
By schisms rent asunder,
By heresies distrest;
Yet saints their watch are keeping,
Their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song.

4 'Mid toil and tribulation,
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace for evermore;
Till with the vision glorious
Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great Church victorious
Shall be the Church at rest.

5 Yet she on earth hath union
With God, the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion
With those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we
Like them, the meek and lowly,
On high may dwell with thee. Amen.

S. J. STONE, 1866

The people standing, the Bishop says

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
People **And blessed be his kingdom,
now and forever. Amen.**

The Bishop then continues

There is one Body and one Spirit;
People **There is one hope in God's call to us;**
Bishop One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism;
People **One God and Father of all.**
Bishop The Lord be with you
People **And also with you.**
Bishop Let us pray.

Loving God, the Great Alpha and Omega, in whose hands are the beginning and ending of life; in who we live and move and have our being, and who is witness to this community through the generations: Receive our thanks and praise for the good works, gracious deeds, healing graces, and beautiful events which have flowed from our life together in this place. Sustain us with your strong love as we commit its memory and ultimate fruits into your merciful care. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

AMEN.

from the book The Prophet Isaiah 40: 1-8, 11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." A voice says, "Cry out!" And I said, "What shall I cry?" All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the LORD blows upon it, surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather



the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Psalm 139 *Domine, probasti*

S-411



- 1 **LORD, you have searched me out and known me; *
you know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.**
- You trace my journeys and my resting-places *
and are acquainted with all my ways.**
- Indeed, there is not a word on my lips, *
but you, O LORD, know it altogether.**
- You press upon me behind and before *
and lay your hand upon me.**
- Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; *
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.**
- Where can I go then from your Spirit? *
where can I flee from your presence?**
- If I climb up to heaven, you are there; *
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.**
- If I take the wings of the morning *
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,**
- Even there your hand will lead me *
and your right hand hold me fast.**

from Paul's Letter to the Church in Rome 8:28-39

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.



Words: K. in John Rippon's *Selection*, 1787, alt.
Words: *Foundation*, melody from *The Sacred Harp*, 1844

11 11. 11 11

1 How firm a foun - da - tion, ye saints of the Lord,
2 "Fear not, I am with thee; O be not dis - mayed!
3 "When through the deep wa - ters I call thee to go,
4 "When through fier - y tri - als thy path - way shall lie,
5 "The soul that to Je - sus hath fled for re - pose,

1 is laid for your faith in his ex - cel - lent word!
2 For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
3 the riv - ers of woe shall not thee o - ver - flow;
4 my grace, all suf - fi - cient, shall be thy sup - ply;
5 I will not, I will not de - sert to its foes;

1 What more can he say than to you he hath said,
2 I'll strength - en thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
3 for I will be with thee, thy trou - bles to bless,
4 the flame shall not hurt thee; I on - ly de - sign
5 that soul, though all hell shall en - deav - or to shake,

1 to you that for ref - uge to Je - sus have fled?
2 up - held by my right - eous, om - ni - po - tent hand.
3 and sanc - ti - fy to thee thy deep - est dis - tress.
4 thy dross to con - sume, and thy gold to re - fine.
5 I'll nev - er, no, nev - er, no, nev - er for - sake."

from The Gospel According to Matthew 25:34-40

When the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me



clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the

king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

The Sermon:

The preacher and celebrant for this occasion is the Right Reverend Mark A. Beckwith, 10th Bishop of the Diocese of Newark, and canonically the Rector of St. Thomas'.



The Baptismal Covenant

Bishop Do you believe in God the Father?
People **I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.**

Bishop Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?
People **I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

Bishop Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?
People **I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.**

Bishop Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?
People **I will, with God's help.**

Bishop Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People **I will, with God's help.**

Bishop Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People **I will, with God's help.**

Bishop Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People **I will, with God's help.**

Bishop Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People **I will, with God's help.**

Bishop
My brothers and sisters in Christ, we are gathered here in this place that has rooted and grounded us in God's love. A place in which we, and those who have gone before us, have celebrated the mysteries of our faith, shared one another's joys and sorrows, and encountered our Lord in word, sacrament and one another. As we celebrate the Eucharist here for the last time, let us come before God's presence with our common prayer.



Leader For the baptisms celebrated here.

People **We thank God.**

Leader For the confessions made in this place.

People **We thank God.**

Leader For those times when we were forgiven, comforted and consoled.

People **We thank God.**

Leader For the power of God's word proclaimed here in scripture, preaching, and performance.

People **We thank God.**

Leader For those times when we heard it.

People **We thank God.**

Leader For the marriages witnessed and burials commended in this place.

People **We thank God.**

Leader For the children who have been taught here.

People **We thank God.**

Leader For the prayers said in this place.

People **We thank God.**

Leader For the times we have been fed at the Lord's Table here.

People **We thank God.**

Leader For all those who have carried out your ministry in any capacity in this place.

People **We thank God.**

Leader And for the times we have learned to accept your grace working through them.

People **We thank God.**

Leader For the many pilgrims who have come through our doors; the



many lives who have touched ours; and the many lost who have found refuge in this place.

People **We thank God.**

Leader For those times we allowed ourselves to recognize your face in theirs.

People **We thank God.**

Leader For the people of Highlands Bible Church who are willing to take over our buildings and ministries with their own vision.

People **We thank God.**

Leader For we who grieve the loss of “our” church.

People **Lord, have mercy.**

Leader For we who struggle with the changes of this world.

People **Lord, have mercy.**

Leader For we who feel our history in this place is forgotten.

People **Lord, have mercy.**

Leader For we who have been hurt and have hurt others in our response to the Gospel.

People **Lord, have mercy.**

Leader For we whose resentment, like that of the prodigal’s brother, impedes our awareness of grace.

People **Lord, have mercy.**

Leader For we who depart from this place, like Abraham and Sarah, in yearning and hope of another home.

People **Lord, have mercy.**

Leader For we who, like Elijah, must find healing and rest from our labors in solitude.

People **Lord, have mercy.**

Leader For all those times we have not been good stewards of your mission and have failed to carry out the ministry entrusted to us: we now confess our sins against you and each other:

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

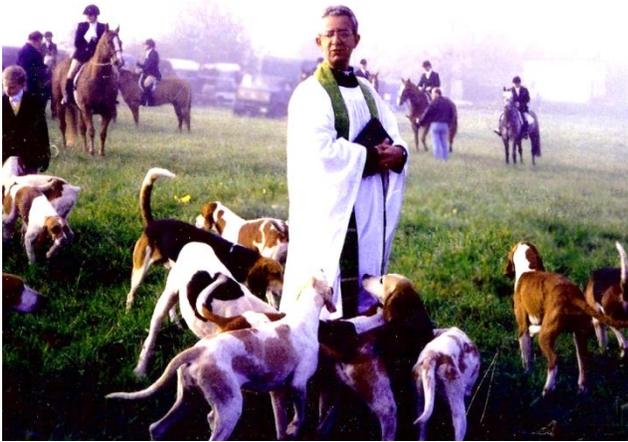
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The Bishop pronounces the absolution and invites the assembled to greet each other in the Peace of our Lord.



The Offertory

The offertory today goes to the Alleluia Fund for mission initiatives in the Diocese of Newark.



Choir Anthem

Anthem of Fellowship

Jay Althouse

Presentation Hymn

Text: John Greenleaf Whittier, 1872

GARDINER

WILLIAM GARDINER'S
Sacred Melodies, 1815

With stately vigor

All things are thine; no gift have we, Lord of all
gifts, to offer thee; And hence with grate-ful hearts to-
day Thine own be-fore thy feet we lay. A-men.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give him thanks and praise.

God of all power, Ruler of the Universe, you are worthy of glory and praise.

Glory to you for ever and ever.

At your command all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home.

By your will they were created and have their being.

From the primal elements you brought forth the human race, and blessed us with memory, reason, and skill. You made us the rulers of creation. But we turned against you, and betrayed your trust; and we turned against one another.

Have mercy, Lord, for we are sinners in your sight.

Again and again, you called us to return. Through prophets and sages you revealed your righteous Law. And in the fullness of time you sent your only Son, born of a woman, to fulfill your Law, to open for us the way of freedom and peace.

By his blood, he reconciled us. By his wounds, we are healed.

And therefore we praise you, joining with the heavenly chorus, with prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and with all those in every generation who have looked to you in hope, to proclaim with them your glory, in their unending hymn:

Celebrant and People

**Holy, Holy, Holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name
of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

The Celebrant continues

And so, Father, we who have been redeemed by him, and made a new people by water and the Spirit, now bring before you these gifts. Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord.

On the night he was betrayed he took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to his friends, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper, he took the cup of wine, gave thanks, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Remembering now his work of redemption, and offering to you this sacrifice of thanksgiving,
**We celebrate his death and resurrection, as we await
the day of his coming.**

Lord God of our Mothers and Fathers: God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; God of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachael and Leah; God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us.

Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal.

Let the grace of this Holy Communion make us one body, one spirit in Christ, that we may worthily serve the world in his name.

**Risen Lord, be known to us in the breaking of the
Bread.**

Accept these prayers and praises, Father, through Jesus Christ our great High Priest, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, your Church gives honor, glory, and worship, from generation to generation. **AMEN.**

Now in whatever language brings you closest to God we say;

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from
evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory
are yours, now and for ever. Amen.**

The Breaking of the Bread

Alleluia! Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;
Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia!

The Gifts of God for the People of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

Communion All are welcome at the Lord's Table

Music notes:

Farther Along was written in 1911 by W.A. Fletcher, an itinerate preacher on his way to the Indian Territories. Sitting next to him on the train happened to be music promoter "Pap" Baxter, who bought the song on the spot for \$2. Pap brought it back to Chattanooga and it became a staple of the Stamps-Baxter gospel songbooks and quartets throughout the country. It was part of the cultural soundtrack to two world wars and the Great Depression.

Jefferson Hascell's *Angel Band* dates from mid 19th century and was set in common meter so as to be sung with any CM hymn tune a rural congregation might know. [e.g., *Amazing Grace, House of the Rising Son, Tallis Ordinal, St. Columba, McKee, St. Anne*]. It was heard in Ken Burns Civil War series. These days, it is frequently used at funerals and to close bluegrass performances.

Let us pray.

Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Bishop gives a final blessing.

261 TIDINGS

J. WALCH, 1876



O SION, haste, thy mission high fulfilling,
To tell to all the world that God is Light;
That he who made all nations is not willing
One soul should perish, lost in shades of night:
*Publish glad tidings:
Tidings of peace,
Tidings of Jesus,
Redemption and release.*

2 Proclaim to every people, tongue, and nation
That God, in whom they live and move, is Love:
Tell how he stooped to save his lost creation,
And died on earth that man might live above.
Refrain

3 Send heralds forth to bear the message glorious;
Give of thy wealth to speed them on their way;
Pour out thy soul for them in prayer victorious
Till God shall bring his kingdom's joyful day.
Refrain

4 He comes again! O Sion, ere thou meet him,
Make known to every heart his saving grace;
Let none whom he hath ransomed fail to greet him,
Through thy neglect, unfit to see his face.
Refrain

M. A. THOMSON, 1870