

SERMON

Luke 1:46-55 | Advent 3 | 12/17/17 | Peter Lane | St. Paul & the Redeemer

Good Morning! It is good to be with you today. And what a blessing to be given this set of scriptures for my final sermon as Rector of St. Paul & the Redeemer. This incredible passage from Isaiah, "[T]he Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners..." Jesus picks that up early in his ministry to show the contours of his radical hospitality. And Paul? We get his charge to the Thessalonians as he closes the first extant letter of Christianity. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances" for "The one who calls you is faithful..." John the Baptist refuses to point to himself. He is only there to "Make straight the way of the Lord..." But my favorite of all is Mary's Magnificat. "My soul doth magnify the Lord..." We didn't read it, we sang it as the canticle this morning and it will be sung again later by the choir in a beautiful setting by Charles Stanford. Mary and her reception throughout church history can serve as inspiration to SPR as you enter your 160th year and to me as I venture forth, reminding us all to seek beauty, to foster community, and to pursue justice.

I will get back to the Magnificat and beauty, community, and justice, but I want first to speak more personally. I think it is the Book of Occasional Services that suggests that when a Rector leaves, he or she should make sure to say, "Thank you" and "You're welcome," "I forgive you" and "I'm sorry." Well, as so many of you do, I did put a lot of myself into the job. You are welcome. Along the way there were times when I was hurt. I forgive you. I know that, all too human, I hurt people along the way. I am sorry.

But allow me to spend significantly more time saying, "Thank you." I was ordained a priest almost exactly 10

years ago, on December 15, 2007, six months after coming to St. Paul & the Redeemer as Assistant Rector. These 10 years have brought with them many blessings. I have endeavored to cultivate a spirit of gratitude and so I would like to say thank you. And I am going to risk thanking people by name.

Being a priest, being a rector, is more than just a job. It is a whole identity that involves not just me but also my family. When I was ordained, I was asked, "Will you do you best to pattern your life and that of your family in accordance with the teachings of Christ, so that you may be a wholesome example to your people?" I did not know the extent to which my family would be part of my work and we did not know what a great good that would be in their lives. My wife Erin and my boys Simon and Connor are the greatest blessings in my life and they have acted here at SPR with grace and conviction. Thank you Erin. Thank you Simon and Connor.

Thank you all and the parishioners that preceded you. Thank you for opening your lives to me. For giving your time, talent, and treasure to a shared vision. Thank you for risking bucking the system and calling me to be Rector. Thank you for standing up for justice, taking the bible and tradition so seriously, and for caring actively for one another. I have watched you make straight the way of the Lord. You are an incredible community.

I would like to thank all of the clergy I have worked with, including Jack, KJ, and Roger, Amity, Jennifer, Ray, and Anne. I worked very closely with Dan Puchalla for many years and I hold him in the highest regard. I would like to say a special thank you to the person who hired me as Assistant Rector, who supported my candidacy to become Rector, who taught me a lot,

including to be much more generous, and whose friendship I value. Thank you Jim Steen. And thank you Tom.

I would like to thank all of the laity who served in leadership here, those who have served on the vestry and as heads of ministries. In particular... The Wardens do critical, often sensitive, behind the scenes work. Thank you Barbra and Gail, Char and Hank, Ellen, Harold, and Romonda. Thank you to the three who did such a terrific job as Treasurer: Tim, Andy, and Doug. And thank you to Kirk, who chaired the capital campaign and many stewardship campaigns. The lay leadership of St. Paul & the Redeemer is robust and working with them has been a great blessing.

Finally I would like to thank all of the people who worked on staff, in particular the current staff. Allow me to highlight the two Directors of Music who played such a critical role in nurturing a worshipping community: first Dent and now Christian, who brings such a deep commitment to his work. Thank you.

You might wonder, with all of those blessings and with this incredible group of people, why I am leaving. To be Rector is a high calling with significant demands. On the winter night in 2010 when I was installed, Bishop Lee gave me this charge, "Care alike for young and old, strong and weak, rich and poor. By your words, and in your life, proclaim the Gospel. Love and serve Christ's people. Nourish them, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come." Right now, my faith, which has always found itself on the far fringes, is too feeble to fuel me further in this role. And, I need to honor the call in my life to serve in new ways.

Let's return to the Magnificat and the ever-blessed Virgin Mary. For Mary's words and what Mary has come to be in the Church can be examples to me in my new work and to you here at SPR. Go spend some time, will you, in the weeks ahead with the images of Mary in this building, like the striking statue and the gorgeous stained glass, both in the chapel. The persistent

courage of Mary is quite an example to us in this advent time of expectancy. In particular, I think we can see in Mary a call to seek beauty, to foster community, and to pursue justice.

Seek beauty. We sang the Magnificat in two different ways this morning and I have to imagine that the Magnificat has been set to music as many times as any other words in the New Testament. One of the Episcopal Church's charisms is its appreciation for beauty. Be a place where people can come and experience beauty, while never allowing yourselves to restrict the canon of beauty to the merely traditional.

Foster community. Have you ever seen Mary depicted alone? She is either with the Angel Gabriel or with the baby Jesus, or in Pietas holding her dead son. Mary is deeply relational, as are we all. At home many of us have little nativity scenes set up. In those, Mary is at the center of a vibrant community--angels, shepherds, kings from the orient, donkeys. In my house, the motley crew has grown and Mary is surrounded by hippos and giraffes and Bavarian children and Swiss dogs, all sitting next to a barn made out of a Haitian coconut. Be a place where people can come for authentic, meaningful, diverse community.

Pursue justice. Have you contemplated how radical are Mary's words? "He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away." Mary's words are hope for the oppressed and the lowly of all generations. Be a place that does not abide structures of racism and misogyny, that does not make peace with the calcified interests of our city, that does imagine a world attuned to Mary's song.

Seek beauty. Foster community. Pursue Justice. May each of us know the blessings of Mary in our life.

Thank you and Amen.