

Message from Robin+

*Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

The Collect for this Sunday is one of my favorites and could easily be renamed the Collect for 2020. I suspect that much of our anxiety is a result of our seeing that things actually are passing away. We are losing loved ones not only due to death from the virus, but also due to our polarization of political views and misunderstandings about racism.

Some of us at Christ and Grace are also anxious about the future of our parish, concerned that we are not doing anything (we are actually doing a lot!), that people are not attending worship (as many are attending online as in person!), and that things will never return to normal (this much is true – we will not return to our old normal).

It's all just really hard stuff and I will confess that some days I want to stay in bed with the covers over my head.

Last week the Vestry welcomed Bishop Susan Haynes to our meeting, and we were able to get to know her and tell her about our hopes and concerns for our parish. Bishop Susan asked us each to answer three questions: What do you love about C&G? What are your deep concerns for C&G? What do you wish for C&G? Our answers to these questions sparked some rich conversation, and there were some common themes that emerged.

- We are a family, we support one another, we love one another and the fellowship.
- We are concerned about membership, decreasing membership, aging members, decline, lack of engagement in outreach activities.
- We hope for more members, for young people and children in church, for more growth.

There were a few answers, however, that went in a different direction, and I think we need to note them. One person said that their concern is that we are *too* focused on getting new members and their wish is that we would do as much good as we can. Another commented that their hope for our parish is that we would be open to understanding each other in all ways. Someone else said we need to adapt to changes to thrive, and someone else said we need to find ways to be a larger presence in our community, among our neighbors.

It was at this point that Bishop Susan asked us to read 1 Corinthians 3:5-9 which says, *“What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.”* And then Bishop Susan asked us, “Whose job is it to grow the church?” It took us a minute, but we got it! God grows the church! Our job is to plant and water. And those answers that went in a different direction? They are exactly where we need to focus as we plant and water!

We have a common purpose and we are God's servants, working together. We are God's field and God's building. All that we have belongs to God. We are not called to focus on the number or age of people in our pews. We are called to shift our focus away from growth and towards planting and watering in our surrounding community. God has already given us everything we need to plant and water in this rapidly changing world. Just as crops must be rotated to keep the soil healthy to produce good crops, we are being called to rotate the ways we have always done things, to make our soil healthy through prayer and study, and to plant new ministries to grow the kingdom.

Earthly things are passing away, but we have been given heavenly things to hold fast. Do not be anxious, grab hold, and let's focus on the eternal things that matter most – faith, hope, and love, as we share the good news with those beyond this family we love so much.

And if you need a few more words of encouragement, the Apostle Paul is always good for that! Here's a portion of our Epistle reading for this Sunday:

*Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well-- since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. Philippians 1:27-30*