

Proper 19, 2009

September 13, 2009

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in thy eyes, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen

*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*

It is a busy morning at St. Martin in the Fields today. Today, we are kicking off our Sunday school classes.

There are special speakers for Stewardship Sunday, and a little later in our 9:00 service we will be commissioning our Sunday school teachers.

So you will all be pleased to know that my remarks this morning will be brief.

Although you should all know at our staff meeting Melinda suggested I should lengthen sermons by an extra minute for every 100,000 we are short in our stewardship goal.

*I am afraid that threat will have to wait for another Sunday morning.*

Some of you may have read my story about leading the Communion service at Holy Comforter three weeks ago.

For those not familiar with the church's ministry, about 60% of the congregation is made up of folks who live with mental illness. Our St. Elizabeth guild makes dinner once a month for a Wednesday evening program and I was doing the Eucharist for the vicar who was on vacation.

During the distribution of Holy Communion, I was passing out the wafers with my usual sentence, *The body of Christ the bread of heaven.*

Most of you who come forward have heard folks say as a response to receiving the bread, *Amen or Thanks be to God.*

However, as I was passing out the bread at Holy Comforter, I came to one lady who looked me in the eye and said in a clear voice. *Thank God that's over.*

Well at least she didn't say that after my sermon.

Her comment got me thinking though, how many times do we see church attendance as drudgery? How many times do we see religious obligations like stewardship or teaching Sunday school as arduous tasks that are to be endured?

This year more than ever we need to be a community and people that emphasize the importance of *joy and thanksgiving in all that we do.*

God has given us many blessings at St. Martin's. This year the school this church started celebrates 50 years of ministry to children and their families.

Your strategic planning committee will be working with Al Talley this fall on a new plan for the programs and building of our church that will hopefully be ready in time for our annual meeting in January.

We have a committed group of volunteers working on developing a plan for a new budget helper shop and outreach center that are meeting today after church.

And in the coming weeks you will learn more about the wonderful plans for our Fall Celebration outreach fundraiser. 40 Days of Celebration is coming your way!!!

And even with Fr. Skutch's recent departure, we have a great group of teachers and volunteers to lead our Rite 13, J2A and YAC programs.

In short, as rector I look around and see a place that is alive with Christ's spirit and dedicated to reaching out and serving others both inside and outside these walls.

I see St. Martins as a place, that like St. Peter, has made the good confession that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, God's chosen Son and our Savior, a place that is ready to take up the cross and follow him.

Each week, we receive the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharistic feast and greet this moment not with *resignation but renewal*, not with *a thank God's that over* but in *joyful expectation* of the next task that God is calling us to do.

Part of this call is answered each year when you make a financial pledge in our annual stewardship campaign.

Each of you have received or will receive a letter that asks for a financial pledge to support our church. (if you haven't gotten it...just raise your hand and one of our stewardship speakers will find you)

In my recent letter, I described several different ways to think about your pledge this year whether as tithing, as your fair share of our annual budget or equal sacrifice toward meeting the goal of our operating budget.

However, you choose to support our church in the coming year, I want each of us to remember that stewardship is not just about the money we give to church.

It is about our time, our talent, and our treasure given as a thanksgiving for God's blessings in our lives.

The greatest strength of St. Martin's has always come from the time and the talent that our parishioners have. It is your willingness to share your cloaks with others in need.

This year I want to invite all of you to make that commitment to the ministry of our church.

There is no financial pledge that is too small, no talent that you have that cannot be utilized, no time that you cannot give our church that will not be valued and treasured by Christ and the members of our community.

What will it profit any of us, if we gain the world but lose our soul????

For it is my prayer, my hope that this will be the kind of year, that when we receive the bread and blood of our savior, our response will be thank God for the new beginning, God gives us each week in this place and among this community of believers.

Let us not grow weary in well doing for the good of all.

Thanks be to God.