



Proper 22, The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jonathan Stepp
October 4, 2020

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A man travelled to Europe for a three month vacation and he asked a friend to take care of his cat while he was gone. A couple of weeks into the trip he called in to check and see how the cat was doing and his friend said, “sorry, man, your cat climbed up on the roof, fell off, and died.” He was stunned, of course, and said “hey, don’t just spring such terrible news on me. You should have broken it to me gently: the first time I called, tell me the cat is on the roof; the next time I called tell me the cat fell but the vet is hopeful he’ll pull through; and then on my third call tell me the cat didn’t survive.”

“Okay,” his friend replied, I guess that makes sense. Then the man asked his friend, “by the way, how’s my mom doing?” And the friend replied, “well, she climbed up on the roof . . .”

Since today is the Sunday of our annual meeting, I thought I’d take some time in the sermon to share with you how I think our parish is doing. Don’t worry, I don’t think All Saints has climbed up on the roof.

In the annual report you will see my Rector’s report for the year, as well as a financial report, both of which will give you some sense of how we are doing in material concerns. I want to talk right now about how we are doing spiritually – and use as my jumping off point the text we read from St. Paul’s letter to the Philip-pians.

St. Paul says that he had to give up a lot in order to follow Christ. He gave up his identity within Judaism, his sense of accomplishment for being obedient to the law of Moses, and he gave up some of his most funda-mental assumptions about who God is. In order to follow Christ he experienced a profound change in his view of the world. It wasn’t easy, he tells us, but it was worth it. Knowing Christ, and sharing in Christ’s death and resurrection, was, to Paul, infinitely more valuable than all that other stuff from his previous life.

We also, have had to give up a lot in our lives this year. What we have given up has been very different than Paul’s experience. For most of this year we had to give up gathering in person for worship, we had to

give up being together at activities like coffee hour and pickle ball, and we had to give up important ways of serving the community, like Corn Fest and the Recovery Festival.

Like Paul, we gave up these things in order to follow Christ. We gave them up in order to follow Christ by showing love to others and care and concern for the health of others and the safety of our community, not to mention our own health and safety. We sacrificed a lot.

I am enormously proud of how All Saints Episcopal Church has handled this situation. I have watched you all sacrifice your desires, your comfort, and your life together as a church family in order follow Jesus and be like him – showing his love to others by going above and beyond your duty to not endanger others in a time of pandemic. I think it speaks to your spiritual health and your maturity in Christ that you have been willing to set aside your own right to freedom in order to do your part to slow the spread of the pandemic and protect the health and lives of others.

In the midst of all that we have lost this year, and all that we have had to give up, we have gained Christ. We have gained a deeper appreciation of how Christ's love inspires us to sacrifice for others, of how Christ's love can help us find ways to connect with each other even when we are physically separated, and of how Christ's love inspires us to help one another in times of crisis. So I commend you, and thank you, for all that you have given up to follow Jesus.

As we prepare to begin a new year together in love and worship, we can join with St. Paul as he says “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, we press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.” Amen.