



The Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder

September 25, 2011

***Ministry: Lay and Ordained***

Pentecost 15 Year A

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts, be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Whether or not you like to dance in the traditional sense of that word, the truth is that God has invited each and every one of us to the dance of life—a dance that is filled with a complexity of emotions and circumstances. And in the midst of this dance, when we are willing to stop for a moment and listen, perhaps we can hear the voice of God whispering in our ears: *If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*

This passage from Philippians is the Apostle Paul's plea to the Church in Philippi to unite in Jesus Christ, so that they may be empowered to answer Christ's call and serve both the Church and the larger Kingdom of God. Paul follows these words with, *for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2)* We as well have a responsibility to be faithful to that call. One of the greatest leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Winston Churchill, once said: *The price of greatness is responsibility.* To be responsible is to claim that we are "response-able." So what about the ministry at St. John's to which we have all been called in this time of new beginnings?

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

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Let me share a story:

The first time I personally met a priest by the name of Jim Fenhagen was on the first day of classes at The General Theological Seminary, he was the seminary Dean. I was assigned to his small group to examine the question: *What is ministry to you?* Our group was about as diverse as one could imagine—I was the youngest at 22, with the oldest being sixty. We were male, female, with varied backgrounds from several parts of the country. One of the group's members, a fifty year-old African American woman, would one day become one of my closest friends and colleagues in the priesthood—preaching at my installation as the rector of Holy Trinity Parish in Decatur, Georgia. She was also called as a reference by St. John's Nominating Committee.

However, my first encounter with the Dean Fenhagen was through his book, *Mutual Ministry*, in which he defined ministry in the following words: *Ministry is an act undertaken in the name of Christ...The point is that ministry is more than simply doing good. Ministry is an act performed in his name. Therefore, it is not something we solely do on our own, but something Christ does in us, through us, and with us. Our task is to uncover what is already present so that the ministry of the Church might be carried out in its fullness. (Mutual Ministry)* I would like to share with you two of the ways in which we are called to go forth in ministry together.

The great 19<sup>th</sup> century American poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, wrote in his poem, *A Psalm of Life: Tell me not in mournful numbers, life is but an empty dream! For the soul is dead that slumbers and things are not what they seem.* This poem, as so many of Longfellow's, speaks to the enthusiasm which we should embrace life...embrace our ministries. The very word enthusiasm comes from the original

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Greek *entheo* that literally means *the God within*. We are first called to be enthusiastic about and in the ministry of Christ at St. John's! I believe that God is about a great work in our midst.

Second, God must always come first. You have been called to turn your service, your ministry over to Almighty God. What is your day like—day-to-day—after you wake up in the morning? If you are to claim that God does indeed come first in your life, then how does that manifest itself on a daily basis? Do you pray at some time? Do you read and reflect upon God's Word at some point in the day? Are you listening for God's voice, God's urging of you toward the way that you may serve Christ here at St. John's.

When I was a seminarian at The General Theological Seminary, there was this one experience that in an unexpected way made a significant impact upon one of the ways that I begin each day with God. During my second year in seminary, my Church history class was invited late one afternoon to the professor's apartment for sherry. This very "Anglican practice" was one that most of us welcomed as a relief from the demanding pace of the academic and spiritual life of a student.

Father Wright really enjoyed taking all of us on a tour of his home. And what stuck out in my mind more than anything else was what I saw taped to his bathroom mirror. Running up and down both sides of the mirror were a series of prayers. Father Wright explained to us that while he shaved each morning, he used that time as well to be with God in prayer. God first.

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C.S. Lewis once wrote, *We may ignore, but we can never evade, the presence of God. The world is crowded with him. He walks everywhere incognito. And the incognito is not always hard to penetrate. The real labour is to remember, to attend. In fact, to come awake. Still more, to remain awake.* (*Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* p.75)

What ministry is God calling you to at St. John's in this new beginning together? Are you being called to serve within the Sunday morning liturgies as an Acolyte, Server, Chalice Bearer, Reader, or Chorister? Are you being called to serve on the Altar Guild? Maybe you are being called to be a part of our lay pastoral care ministry? Or are you being called to serve within one of our many Outreach ministries...the food bank, the clothing bank, or maybe the Reading Club ministry? Are you being called to help our church grow by personally inviting a neighbor or a friend? Maybe you are being called to serve on the Vestry of St. John's?

Mother Teresa once wrote:

*Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin. Amen.*

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