



The Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder, Rector

September 4, 2011

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The Reverend Dr. Philip C. Linder

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.

What a great joy and privilege it is to be celebrating the Holy Eucharist and preaching this day at St. John's! I am very grateful to the Nominating Committee, Vestry, Bishop Sauls, and most of all God for this call to serve as your priest and rector. This has been a long spiritual, emotional, and physical journey for Ellen, me and our family to reach this holy time and holy place. I know as well, that it has been a long process and journey for the leadership and people of St. John's. However what is powerfully clear is that today we have together begun a new and exciting chapter in our lives as the community of the faith, which we lovingly know as St. John's Episcopal Church in Versailles, Kentucky. With God's guidance and grace we shall accomplish great things together for the Kingdom of God—within these walls, within this local community, within the Diocese of Lexington, and within the world.

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We might first understand this morning's Letter of Paul to the Romans as a listing of the "shall nots" from the commandments, however they are only the necessary "nots" if we are to ever live fully into the greatest commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If we are to ever reach that commandment of Jesus Christ then we cannot live as if adultery, stealing, murder, or coveting are ever acceptable. They can be forgiven, but they are never acceptable. I believe Paul was once again holding the members of the Christian Church in Rome to truth telling, to living the truth of Jesus Christ.

Galileo once wrote *all truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them.* The argument that swirls turbulently around in both American culture and the Christian Church is the very question of what is the truth of Jesus, versus what have we turned Christ's truth into. And as much as we probably would agree that this truth is summed up in his commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves, it seems to take on multiple interpretations and various paths. Today I invite you to examine anew that truth in this wonderful new relationship and chapter in our lives together as the Body of Christ at St. John's

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Two chapters and two weeks ago in Matthew's Gospel we heard the same words we hear today from Jesus: *Truly, I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.* Again, Jesus points to the intimate relationship between our lives in the church in this world with that of the Kingdom of Heaven. How we live matters, and when we live in the truth of Jesus he will be among us: *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them.* (Matthew 18:20)

Have we then discovered the truth of Jesus for our lives? If you have then you know it is about love—love of the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, and mind, and the love of your neighbor as yourself. Unfortunately the latter part of 20th and 21st century American politics and religion have often reduced faith in Jesus Christ to one's stand on a particular issue, usually the ones we call hot button issues. However, the truth of Jesus Christ though is so much larger than any one issue, and in fact what Jesus, and Paul later, encouraged most of all was the willingness of his disciples to be able to have differences on some particulars while remaining faithful to the larger vision for the Kingdom of God. And although the Beatles turned it into a 1960's hit record, it was Jesus who had the original patent on the words, *All you need is Love.*

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What Paul's Letter to the Romans brilliantly puts before us is the necessity for truthfulness and love to go hand in hand if we are ever to reach the vision that Jesus had for the Kingdom of God. What Jesus taught was that you cannot live in a place of untruth and expect to be able to love your neighbor as yourself. And this applies to us as individuals, as Americans, and as a world. St. Paul instructed us: *Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us live honorably as in the day...* Let us live in the truth...let us be truth tellers.

When our children Gabrielle 27, Conrad 25, and Philip Jr. 22, were little in my fussiness I tried to teach them not to touch the glass on the storm doors or the windows in the house—sometimes though their little sticky hands did anyway. Today our dog Champ, a beautiful cocker spaniel, is our new little child that manages to put his wet nose on every inch of glass in our house—I think that is God's way of getting to me. One of the best features on our new home in Versailles is that Champ cannot get to the back glass door from where he sits on the back porch! As we all know, often you cannot see how dirty the glass is, until the early morning sun rises and shines

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right on that glass and all of those smudges appear. Light shows us the areas that need our cleaning if you will, that need our attention. Paul called the church and Christians to live in the truth of Christ's light. He wrote, "Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light." We must look at our lives, like we look at that glass, and see where we need to use the Windex. We should also expect nothing less than the very same truth telling within both Church and society.

Are we living a life that is truthful to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Christian Church? Are we able to have differences with our neighbor and still love them as ourselves? Are we truth tellers? As a Christian community of faith is St. John's proclaiming and living to the best of its ability the truth for which Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again? This is a great challenge before us as we begin our ministry together. This is part of the foundation upon which we must build. It is one that is filled with promise and hope as we seek to be all that God calls us to be. I am very excited about God's possibilities for all of us at St. John's! **+AMEN.**

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