

REFLECTIONS



THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

PSALM 84:1-2

How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

A note to readers of these Reflections on Christ Episcopal Church's Facebook Page and Website: This will be the last reflection I will be posting on these sites as this week our parish welcomes our new rector, Fr. Michael Newago. His first service will be July 18 at our church's 10 AM Eucharist. If you are reading this you and will be in the area on that date, makes plans to attend and welcome Fr. Mike with us.

It has been my pleasure to write these Reflections over the past year while our church's doors were closed and we were without a priest. If you wish to follow my musings and reflections in the future, please check out my blog, <https://thefaithfulagnostic.blogspot.com>. There you will find all of the Reflections I have written during the Covid shutdown of our church archived with a host of other posts I have written since 2014.

A FINAL REFLECTION

by

Norm Wright

With this being my final reflection after having written a total of 70 reflections since March 2020, I invite you to join me in reflecting on the more than three and a half years our parish has been without a rector. We are grateful for Fr. Tim Fountain who for more than a year served as our interim priest and shepherded us through the early months of our vacancy. We are also grateful for the services of Rev. Ellie Thober and Mother Pat White Horse-Carda, who served as our celebrants during our monthly Eucharist services. In between times, our worship team of Deacon John, Liz, Dick, and myself took turns officiating and preaching during our Sunday Morning Prayer services until COVID-19 hit, things drastically changed. We were among the first churches in our community to close our doors and one of the last to reopen them.

The heart yearns for the familiar; to what seemed reliably available to our members prior to the pandemic. Since we did not have the technology available to do online video services and many of our older members did not have the means to retrieve, I offered to do a written weekly devotion that could be mailed or emailed to our members while our church remained closed. These devotion were also made accessible to those who followed our church on Facebook and our church's website.

In those Sunday Devotions I would utilize photos that I had taken of our church's windows and furnishings throughout the devotions to draw attention to some of the details that can be easily overlooked within the ornate setting of our church; to visually cast the devotions within a setting familiar to us members. Unlike many of those who attend our church, I had keys and would frequent the church to ring the churches bells at 3 PM each weekday in conjunction with other churches to show support for the frontline workers fighting this pandemic, our doctors, nurses, and first responders and then to keep in practice as our church's organist.

For many of our members this period of lockdown was agonizing. I can honestly say that having access to an empty church was no less agonizing because an empty church is just that, empty, and its empty nave conveyed a sense of loneliness for the people who frequently worshiped in its space.

I am convinced that God's good will is most evident when things aren't going well; when we experience a period of disorientation, isolation, or feel challenged in some respect - what I have referred to in some of my reflections as being placed on "pause." 2020 could be described as a year in which the "Pause Button" was hit and "normal" was put on hold. In my musings on Jesus' Transfiguration and other transfiguring events described in our scriptures, I presented pause as a moment that precedes a transfiguration; a period of prepping one to see God, oneself, and life as a whole in new light.

Acts of faith emerged during a time many of us were compelled to stay put and keep our distance. I believe acts of faith that kept us connected to our church home was when our vestry utilized this "pause" to make needed repairs to our church. These began with upgrading the church's fire alarm system. COVID-19 underscored the need to upgrade the church's air-flow and filtration system. There was also an urgent need to make extensive

repairs to brick exterior of our 139 year-old church building. Accomplishing those tasks were not merely works of love for the home of the oldest congregation in the former Dakota Territory, but were acts of faith. While our doors were not open, the message was clear to us and our community, “We’re alive and determined to carry on by God’s grace.”

Another act of faith was in extending a call to Fr. Mike, to be our full-time rector. Through much of our interim period we were given to understand that our parish could not afford a full-time priest; that we would have to rely on either sharing a priest with another parish or, for the foreseeable future, continue to rely on supply priests. Fr. Mike, in an act of faith, reached out to us and felt drawn to us and we felt drawn to him. Money was gifted to our parish that allowed making this call not only a possibility but a reality.

We are now about to embark on a new adventure, a new ministry with the arrival of Fr. Mike. Faith abounds and we must keep faith in God and with each other. There is a sense that this period of pause is nearing its end and transfiguration for our parish is at hand; that we shall see and be seen in a new light. What that exactly means, however, is yet to be seen.

What is certain is that loving acts of faith will be required moving forward. The arrival of Fr. Mike doesn’t mean our parish has achieved its goals or that our work as parishioners is done. With Fr. Mike’s arrival, a new day is dawning and our work is just getting started. Our goal and our ministry is to continue the ministry of Jesus in our world and increase the family of Christ in our midst; a goal that will hopefully continue long after us by future generations.

If you are a reader of these reflections, consider yourself a part of our church family. If you live in or near the Yankton area, consider being present with us in our/your church home on Sundays whenever you can. Your presence will be much appreciated. You will be welcomed and loved as a child of God, as all are children of God and siblings of one another.

Ours is a church, a family, one can ease into. There’s no rush or need to make a hasty commitment. Sit with us for awhile, pray with us, worship with us, and learn about us and the God we love. So come and be transfigured with us. Share with us a new vision; a new adventure into the light of God’s love for all.

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God of wonder and grace, we thank you for protecting and keeping our church family together during this long interim and the uncertainty of this pandemic. We give you thanks for the services of Fr. Tim, Rev. Ellie, and Mother Pat and for those of our parish who served when there was no priest available. We give thanks for those who looked after our church home, our vestry and others; for the completion of many needed projects and for the prayers and financial support of the faithful members and friends of this parish. Above all, we give thanks for your Holy Spirit which guided Fr. Mike and us into mutual ministry together. Bless him as our new rector and bless his family as they make a new home with us. Bless us also as we join with Fr. Mike in engaging and envisioning new ministries. Keep us mindful of your love and bind this family of faith ever closer to one another in your love. Strengthen us in faith that we may increase the family of Christ in our midst. All this we ask through the same Jesus Christ, your Son, our Brother. Amen