

Proper 4, Year B, 2018

1 Samuel 3:1-10

Psalms 139:1-5, 12-17

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Mark 2:23-3:6

Good morning and welcome to Christ Church and to the celebration of our 150th anniversary in this historic church. Today, I'd like to begin my reflection by sharing a few stories with you; stories that illustrate the strength of this place and stories that also illustrate how the Holy Spirit has moved and continues to move us forward into the future. But before we look to our future, I'd like to share a few stories of our past.....

The winter of 1903-1904 was a historic one in Vermont, especially in terms of bitterly cold temperatures. On an especially bitterly cold Saturday afternoon in January, 1903, a fire broke out in the church which nearly destroyed the entire building. Because heating coal was scarce at the time, furnaces which normally burned efficiently with coal were instead fueled by wood. It was the combination of an over-filled furnace, live embers, and wooden heat returns which caused a spark to ignite within the returns and ultimately set the church catastrophically ablaze. Subsequently, the roof of this sanctuary was nearly burned completely off and the main stained-glass window in this chancel was totally destroyed. The 1903 estimate of loss to the window alone was set at \$700.00. And given the rate of inflation and by today's standards, that same window would now cost over \$18,500 to rebuild. Another sad consequence to the fire was the loss of a newly installed Hutchings-Votey organ that had been previously commissioned in the spring of 1902. One has to wonder how the church's sexton and the rector, Rev Alonzo Lewis, got through those trying days. I can only imagine the guilt and sorrow that the sexton placed upon himself knowing that his actions caused the fire and how the rector must have had to console him and the entire congregation as they navigated forward through such a bleak and trying time.

Twenty-four years later came the fateful fall of 1927. Now the fall of '27 was a particularly wet fall, most especially during the month of October. Having received so much rain that summer and fall, the ground was completely saturated and additional rainfall threatened to add to the already rising levels of the rivers around Vermont. But it was in early November, 1927 when the skies really opened up and the rising rivers would forever change the landscape around central Vermont. Between the dates of November 2-4, 1927, the Great Flood of Vermont decimated many municipalities and this was especially true in downtown Montpelier. At its peak on November 3rd, rain torrents fell at well over an inch per hour for nearly seven consecutive hours. During the historic flooding that followed, Christ Church suffered significant water damage with the high-water mark reaching twelve feet above the level of this first floor. The high-water line within this church is marked by a brass plaque that is still on the wall in the entryway to this church. In addition to flood damage throughout the church, the organ that had been replaced after the 1903 fire was also another total loss. Yet another organ needed to be ordered from a manufacturer because of loss due to a natural disaster. On a side but related

note, in 2015 when the chancel of this church was again being renovated due to a crane mishap, I can remember finding silt in the floorboards that must have come from the murky waters of the Winooski River and the flooding of 1927. It was the Rev. Frank Knapp who helped to carry the congregation of Christ Church through that trying time. And Rev. Knapp must have been quite resilient and dedicated, because he stayed on as rector of this church from 1921, through the Great Depression, until 1945 and the close of World War II.

And finally, in the year 2015, the elected leadership team (vestry) of this church decided to finally begin tackling some of the long-standing building issues that have plagued this strong, but leaky sanctuary for a long, long time. The northwest corner of the sanctuary was in greatest need of repair and through the gifts and talents of Bruno Gubetta and Alpine Restoration, work on this church was about to begin. On the morning of Monday, June 8, 2015 shortly after 7:00AM, a crane meant to lift granite capstones off the northwest corner of the church, suddenly collapsed in a freak accident and four lives were thankfully and miraculously spared. Three construction workers from Alpine Restoration were standing on scaffolding outside of the church, guiding the crane's cabling when the large pin at the base of the crane suddenly came loose, causing the extended crane to flip from its foundation and come crashing down onto the roof of the church. I will never forget the phone call I received from Shawn Bryan on that fateful Monday morning when he said to me, "You'd better get down to the church. A crane just collapsed onto the building." The bad news was that the crane collapse created significant damage to the church. The good news was that the church's structural integrity remained surprisingly intact and we were spared some real reconstruction headaches. After six months of worshipping in our Parish Hall, on December 6, 2015, we processed back into this church with our Bagpiper, Ben Montross leading the way. To be sure, it has become clearly evident that neither fire, nor flood, nor crane can break the back or the many ministries of Christ Episcopal Church which has stood proudly and in strength on State Street in Montpelier since it was first erected in 1868.

And as we look to the scriptures that were assigned for today's liturgy, I suppose I didn't find it surprising that their themes would speak to us about how God calls each of us to ministry, about what humble leadership looks like in the face of adversity, and how Jesus' own ministry of compassion and healing broke the barriers of what was deemed acceptable by the religious leaders of his day. In a nutshell, the combined themes of these readings teach us:

- That God is persistent and frequently calls us to action when we least expect it.
- That God uses ordinary people like you and me to accomplish great things with the power of God's Spirit in us.
- That God challenges us to stretch beyond our comfort zones by doing new things and ministering to people, in edgy and innovative ways.

In each of today's readings from 1st Samuel, 2nd Corinthians, and in Mark's gospel, we see the ways in which God worked through ordinary people to achieve some extraordinary things. And that is what I want to focus on in the second half of this reflection; the ordinary people of Christ Church who have done some extraordinary things. And while traditional church leadership in

the past has been equated primarily with older, white haired men like me, those whom I want to honor this morning are the strong women of this church; key leaders and influential decision makers who have supported and guided this congregation successfully for more than 178 years.

Now, there is a danger in naming names in public addresses like this; the danger being that one may inadvertently omit significant names from history. Undoubtedly, I will do that today, but in advance I ask for forgiveness for my ignorance. I will, however, highlight some of the key female leadership figures who have contributed significantly to this church in the past and I will also raise up and honor those female leaders among us today who are leading Christ Episcopal Church forward into the light of a new day.

The following are some of the significant women leaders who have contributed to CC's legacy:

Helen Grannis Redfield was married to the Honorable Timothy Parker Redfield and together, they were dedicated life-long Christians and members of Christ Church, Montpelier. In 1893, Helen donated the marble and onyx altar that still stands at the back of the chancel. In 1901, Helen Redfield also gave the pulpit in honor of her father and mother, William and Nancy Melinda Grannis. And in 1906, the marble reredos above the altar was given in honor and in memory of Helen Grannis Redfield and all that she did for Christ Church, Montpelier.

Several key women of the Christ Church parish are also remembered in the stained-glass windows that beautify this place. Some of those women include: Betsy Tarbox Dewey, Abba M. Smith, Ella Dewey Pitkin, and Lucy Hubbard Fifeld. By taking a walk around this sanctuary you will see the windows and the associated stories that are dedicated to these faithful women leaders.

In 1912, the all-male vestry sold several acres of land behind the church for the sum of \$3500.00. The ladies of the parish were aghast and under the leadership of Mrs. Fred Howland, the ladies moved at the church's annual meeting, that the vestry was not authorized to sell any more parish land. The motion passed with flying colors.

Earlier in Christ Church's history, the Rev. George Manser (1842-1848) encouraged the establishment of the Ladies Aid Society of Christ Church, which contributed to the greatly to the life and support of the parish. Later in the history of Christ Church, other women's organizations formed such as: The Women's Auxiliary of Christ Church later shortened to the Women's Guild and also the establishment of The Kings' Daughters. The Kings' Daughters of Christ Church was the first female organization to recognize the need for a hospital in Montpelier and they started earning money for a hospital fund. Mrs. Charles Heaton was a member of the King's Daughters at Christ Church and through her vital interest, her father-in-law Homer Heaton, gave the money necessary to build the Heaton Hospital buildings on Heaton Street in Montpelier. Mrs. Abba Smith was another key female leader at Christ Church who contributed greatly to the Kings' Daughters and the Women's Guild. One of the early financial projects of the Women's Guild was helping the vestry to pay off the mortgage on the old Parish House Building, which preceded our current day Parish House built in 1938. Both the Ladies'

Guild and the Kings' Daughters held a supper at their annual meeting. Members were required to earn a dollar that they brought to the supper, so it was traditionally called the "How I Earned My Dollar Supper." The rhymes each member composed telling how she earned her dollar were printed in booklet format and also sold to raise more money. The following is an example of a ballad written by Mrs. Alice Dewey:

"The Ladies' Guild in our small new city, are wholly to blame for this simple ditty. In a moment of madness, now plain to be seen, I promised to earn them ten dimes, bright and clean. How to earn them I found to my cost was a question, on which much time I have lost. But when there's a will there's always a way, and neckties are an article for which husbands will pay. So quickly I made mine, from lawn soft and white, five neckties, and so earned my dollar so bright.'

Another story from Christ Church's history was that of Mrs. Joseph De Boer, who would each year ask her husband for the funds necessary to permit her to give liberally to the Women's Guild. As the story goes, each year as Mrs. De Boer asked the question of her husband, the affirmative answer from Mr. De Boer would be, "Just give me one of your beautiful smiles, dear."

Moving forward in our history at Christ Church, the following list of other notable female leaders have risen up to continue the forward movement of the Spirit in Christ Church and her ministries:

In the year 1969, Miss Susan Howland was named Senior Warden. This is significant to note because Miss Howland's nomination as Sr. Warden came to pass prior to the 1970 General Convention's passed resolution that then allowed women to serve on vestries. Obviously, both Christ Church and Susan Howland were well ahead of their own time!

Other key female leaders in Christ Church's history include:

Patricia Carruth, Senior Warden, 1973

Barbara Cheney, Senior Warden, 1975

Laura Moulton, Senior Warden, 1978

Carol Barre, Senior Warden, 1980

Joan Sabens and Eunice Crosby, both served Altar Guild Directress' of Christ Church for several years at a time.

The Rev Janet Brown was the first woman ordained priest in the Diocese of Vermont and studied with the Rev. David Brown who served Christ Church as the rector from 1966-1980.

The Rev Jean Duncan Brooks was the first female permanent vocational Deacon of Christ Episcopal Church and was ordained to the order of deacons in 1979.

Today, Christ Episcopal Church continues to boldly move forward in faith with other female leaders among us who serve this place for the love of God and for the love of our fellow neighbors. The following list is a partial listing of the female leaders who stand among us today, serving God in their own leadership calls-to-action and please forgive me for any glaring omissions:

Dot Albert, Former Discretionary Fund Manager and a mighty force to be reckoned with.
Gloria Alexander, Altar Guild leader
Dierdre Allen, Former CC Administrator
Sarah Baker, Worship & Counter leadership
Lynn Bates, Canon to the Ordinary & diocesan consultant for CC
Sarah Blair, Music & Counter leadership
Ruth Elizabeth Sykas Beard, Former Junior Warden and active minister throughout Christ Church & the Diocese.
Helen Bryan, Vestry & Finance leader.
Ann Bushey, Vestry & Youth & Family Leader
Brynn Bushey, Youth Leadership
Melinda Carr, Pastoral Care & Communications leadership
Ginny Catone, Senior Warden, Discretionary Fund Manager & Vestry Secretary
Linnea Cecere, Former CC Administrator
Aldora Chamberlin, Hospitality leader & Full Ladle Ministry leader
Lynnette Combs, Choirmaster & Organist, overall collaborative team leader
Wendy Dale, Community Meals leader & social justice advocate
Patricia DuPont, Altar Guild leadership
The Rev Lee Ferry, Episcopal priest, preacher & pastoral care leader
Charlotte Gibson, Founder of Full Ladle Soup Kitchen
The Rev Ann Grady, Interim priest at Christ Church prior to my arrival
Lois Hadd, Counting Ministry & Altar Guild leadership
The Rev Beth Hilgartner, Episcopal priest who served Christ Church as a curate.
Sarah Hofmann, Vestry leadership
Martha Holden, Altar Guild & Sudan Communion leader
Diane Holland, Vestry leader, preacher, Choir & Worship Committee leader
Deb Jerard MD, Sudan Communion leader & health care advocate
The Rev Jean Staffed Jersey, Retired Episcopal priest, diocesan leader, & social justice advocate
Ramona Kacyvenski, Former CC Administrator
Anita Krauth, Pastoral Care leadership
Amy Kuzio, Full Ladle Feeding Ministry leader
Laurie Labarthe, Worship & Pastoral Care leader
Ida Capron Lange, Hospitality & Stewardship leader and another serious force to be reckoned with.
Chris Long, Worship leader
The Rev Beth Ann Maier MD, Regional Deacon, Social Justice advocate, & preacher, and child advocate.
Kate McCann, Vestry leader

Elle McCullough-Lovell, Worship & Diocesan leader
Eleanor McIntyre, Altar Guild leader
Jackie Mills-Brown, Former CC Administrator, Altar Guild, and choir member
Kate Montross, Pastoral care leadership
Hannah Morris, Former CC Administrator
Joan Murray, Vestry & pastoral care leader
Rilla Murray, Senior Warden & congregational leader
The Rev Susan Ohlidal, Former Diocesan Congregational leader & congregational companion CC
Elizabeth Parker, Diocesan leadership team member
Jean McLaughlin Peterson, Former flower ministry leader & founder of "God's Grounds Crew."
Jody Pettersen, Worship Committee & Usher leadership
Mary Jane Potter, Altar Guild & seasonal flower leadership
Kathleen Preis, Administrator & Altar Guild leader and overall collaborative team leader
Linda Prescott, Social Justice advocate & community meal leader
Linda Radtke, Music & Worship Leader
Marty Roberts, Music & Social Justice leader
The Rev. Sr. Laurian Seeber, Episcopal priest & social justice advocate
Angela Simpson, Worship & vestry leadership
Suzanne Skea, Former Administrator & Altar Guild leadership
Liz Slayton, Vestry leadership
Candi Smith, Usher & Counter ministry leadership
Connie Story, Hospitality leader
Maggie Thompson, Congregational & Diocesan leadership, Chair Bishop Discernment
Nominating Committee
Judy Walke, Music & Housing leadership
Gloria Walker, Hospitality leadership
Nancy Walker, Music leadership
The Rev. Auburn Watersong, Associate Priest for CC, preacher and Youth & Women's Advocate
Nancy Webb, Choir & Hospitality leadership
Barbara Weedon, Unfailing caretaker and benefactor of Christ Church's Memorial Garden &
courtyard grounds
Corrie Wilcox, Vestry & Finance leadership
Elizabeth Wilcox, Youth Teacher, Leader, Mentor and preacher
Sharon Wilson, Christ Church Community Meals Leadership & Organizer
Sharon Winn Fannon, Senior Warden, Consultant & vestry leadership.
Denise Womer, Youth & Families Leader & Hospitality Leadership

On this, our 150th anniversary marking our time in the current Christ Church sanctuary, we give thanks to God for the honor of serving alongside all the faithful leaders of this place who have made Christ Church what she is today. As we mark this day and forge forward into an unknown, but bright future, may the power of the Holy Spirit continue to set our hearts on fire, as we forge forward in faith by doing the work that God will continue giving us to do. For all of these blessings, gifts, and challenges, we give thanks to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen!

Paul M. Habersang+
Priest-in-Partnership since 2011
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