

St. Mark's Episcopal Church  
The Rev. Rick Veit  
052117

Prayer time with Wardens

Thank you (Bud, Perry). As many of you know, I will be starting a three-month sabbatical next week. It is a great blessing that your vestry, the Bishop of Wyoming, and the Commission on Ministry, have offered me this time for prayer and silence, for worship, study, and rest time with my family. It is a great blessing that they, that you, have opened the door for me to be faithful and to take a sabbath.

God intended for people to take sabbath time regularly. He created the world, and then he rested. He visions for people to work and rest and worship. For some reason, perhaps it is the 24/7 nature of being a rector, but for some reason, clergy are notoriously poor at taking time for themselves, taking time to refresh. I am grateful for this opportunity. I am also thankful for Fr. Dave McElwain, Rev. Bernadine Craft, Fr. Bob Davidson, and Fr. Dick Naumen, who will be assisting the people of St. Mark's Church, all of you, in leadership, pastorally, liturgically, and in preaching.

As I said, the sabbatical will consist of prayer and silence, primarily at The Abbey of St. Walburga. It is a Roman Catholic community of nuns and a priest, who live on the Wyoming/Colorado border between Laramie and Fort Collins. I go there occasionally for spiritual direction. The sabbatical will also include study. I will be taking an intensive one-week graduate course on reconciliation through the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas. Then, I will be interviewing 3-4 Episcopal churches throughout the country, learning best practices and most difficult challenges. This will culminate in a report for the people of St. Mark's Church and for the Diocese of Wyoming. I will be writing and composing music tied to my book: Prodigal Evangelism. "Yes, I am writing a book. One that has been in the making for many years." Finally, I will be resting and spending time with my wife and children.

You and I have been working hard together these past twelve years furthering the Gospel, furthering the good news of Jesus Christ, here in Cheyenne and throughout the world. You are strong, and I will be excited to hear about the ways that God has worked through you, upon my return. I will be excited to hear about the ways that you have worshipped together and served the Lord and each other.

This is what we learn throughout the Bible, communities of people trying to be faithful in worship and in service to the Lord and to each other. People of the Old Covenant worshipped the Lord and tried to follow the Law. People of the New Covenant worshipped the Lord through their Savior, Jesus, who led them to love and serve all people, especially those in great need.

The book of Acts, that we heard from today, particularly teaches about how this New Covenant, this new relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, spread throughout the world.

A man named Saul was a faithful person of the Old Covenant. He disagreed with and wanted to rid the world of the new movement called The Way, which would eventually be called Christianity. Saul was even killing people. Then God reached out to him and changed his heart. God transformed a person who was doing dastardly acts, and saved him...and helped save the world. And Saul, who then was called Paul, ended up being one of the most influential evangelists and Christian disciples throughout history. God is here to save us each and every day as well.

In the story today, Paul is on his second missionary journey speaking in the city of Athens. He had left Jerusalem and traveled north through what is now Syria and Turkey. He then made his way into Greece, sharing the good news of God's love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ with anyone who would listen. God loves people and wants to inspire them to care for and love each other, following in the way of Jesus Christ, his Son.

He was speaking in front of an Athenian Council, one that had authority over religion and morals. They were curious about this new teaching of Jesus Christ that Paul was bringing to them. Paul had noticed that some of their religious beliefs required an altar that had an inscription, 'To an unknown god.' He was there to teach people that the God of Jesus Christ dwells around people and inside of people, not just in a physical property. In other words, the altar is here (point to the heart). It is a religion where people know God in their hearts and have a relationship with Him.

Paul said, "The God who made the world and everything in it,..does not live (just) in shrines made by human hands..." He gives life to all things. And 'in him we live and move and have our being'. We are God's offspring. Our religion is not about how much gold or silver or stone we have, although art and architecture and property can be a part of that process that leads us to the Lord. But our faith is about God and humanity having a relationship with each other. It is about repentance and forgiveness when we hurt ourselves and each other. God calls us to reconciliation. And it is through a relationship with Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that this can happen. God does not leave us orphaned. He loves us and will continue to inspire us to love and serve each other, and to do this continually.

Today, I covenant with you all that I will continue to do this while on sabbatical. And I would ask that you do the same, following in the steps of Jesus, following in the steps of Paul, empowered by the Holy Spirit. I pray that you will continue worshipping the Lord, and continue to do the work of the Lord in this community of Cheyenne and throughout the world. And I will commit to doing the same.

I would like to close with a Collect for Guidance from the Book of Common Prayer. Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Amen.*