

Beyond Expectation

Earlier this week as I was working in the offices in the Sibley House, I came across a notebook - from 1902. It took my breath away, because this notebook contained the founding document of the endowment fund here at Christ Church. I sat down right there on the floor of the second story of Sibley House and read it, hearing the voices of our ancestors in faith, right here in this place, who powerfully invested in a future that they themselves would not see, a future that you and I are living right now.

Forgive me because you know your - and our - history better than I do at the moment. However, if you already know this story, then I trust you won't mind hearing it again, as I share with you the words that they wrote. On that day, February 10, 1902, H. B. Ledyard, H. M. Campbell, and Sidney D. Miller wrote to their fellow parishioners here at Christ Church:

"The Parish of Christ Church has been in existence for fifty-six years. From the plain small wooden edifice originally constructed and used only for religious services and for the Sunday School, the property has grown so that now we hold free from encumbrance the Stone Church, Chapel, and Choir room, the Church House, the Church Home and other buildings attached therein, and the Rectory on Jefferson Avenue. This has all been prudently acquired as occasion demanded in the process and progress of growth.

The religious, charitable, educational, and social agencies have largely increased; and, instead of being called upon to provide merely for services in the Church and for the Sunday School, it is now necessary to furnish means to take care of these various additional agencies. Without referring at length to the work done in the Church Home--intended as a temporary shelter for women--or to the various uses to which the Church House is put in affording accommodations for the Woman's Auxiliary, the Young Women's Guild, the Girl's Friendly Society, the Sewing School for Children, the Employment Bureau, the several clubs for men and boys[--St. Andrew's, Trowbridge, Lewis Cass, Burgess, and Parochial; and], the Manual Training School, and the Gymnasium--this recital itself shows that large demands must constantly be made upon the generous spirit and resources of the parishioners.

In addition to the expense of the current work it must be noted that as the buildings grow older and are much in active use, the necessity for repairs and improvements increases and creates a considerable charge upon the treasury."

And here is where their words are so prescient, they could have been spoken today:

"We must also recognize the important fact that the character of the neighborhood has changed already, and is likely to show greater changes in the future...The growing disposition to make the Church in all its ministries as free as possible,"-- and hear how timely these words are, too, equally true in 1902 as they are today-- "to welcome all equally to its services, and, to extend a helping hand to all in need, cannot be gratified without provision being made by those upon whom the duty rests."

They continued, "Two generations have passed away since the Parish was originated. Many sacred memories and loving associations linger here for us and those who follow. It is to make more sure the future stability and strength of the Church that it has been proposed to raise a fund to be placed in trust...[to] add materially to the efficient administration of the affairs of the Church and the promotion of the many good works now conducted by it."

And then continues a list of everyone who contributed to that fund in 1902. The list includes people who made a contribution right then and there on February 10th, and what moved me deeply is that in addition, many of these, our ancestors in faith, noted that they would fulfill the rest of their pledge on

Easter Sunday of that year, trusting that God will always take what looks like fear and scarcity and make it into something new.

In today's Gospel story, Jesus is sitting across the street from the treasury, watching people contribute to it. He watches many people go by, and pauses when he sees a poor widow put in two copper coins. Contrary to a quick assessment of the text or popular perception of it, he does not actually reprimand the people giving out of their abundance. He does point out that what the woman is doing is very special.

He calls his friends around him and says, "Hey, look! Look! Look at this. She just put in two coins. That is all she has. This, my friends, is what the kingdom of God is." Whereas all those who had gone before her had given what was expected, perhaps without thinking, perhaps without caring, and I would think without imagining what God is doing with their contribution, this poor woman dares to give basically all that she has, trusting and imagining - knowing - that God is going to do something new with it.

I am so moved by all of our ancestors in this place, especially those writing and contributing in 1902 because they, like the woman, were giving so much of themselves toward what they could not and would not see. They were going well beyond what was expected: demanding their forethought, their faith, their courage; demanding their whole selves.

As I sat on the floor reading those documents, I'll tell you, I could nearly feel Jesus looking over my shoulder, saying, "Yeah, that! That! That is what the kingdom of God is about."

What does it mean to put our whole self toward something? What does it mean to put more of our self toward something, or someone, than would ordinarily be considered reasonable, or logical, or expected?

Reasonable, logical, expected: These are not words that I have come to associate with God--much as I have tried, because that would be way easier. In my life, the marks and moments of God are those that defy reason, that surpass logic, that go well beyond expectation. Putting our whole self toward something that we might not see in our lifetime? That goes well beyond reason.

I am so excited that together we are opening a new chapter. What will our future hold? What fruits will we glean from your long steadfastness in times of uncertainty and your hope that days like this would come? What new gifts, new dreams, new desires will God plant in our hearts? What is this new thing God is doing among us? We may not know. We might not know for quite some time. But when we put our whole selves in, beyond reason, beyond logic, beyond mere expectation, trusting that God always is taking our fear and making something new, it may be so. Amen.

The Rev. Emily Williams Guffey, Rector

The 25th Sunday after Pentecost - 1 Kings 17:8-16, Mark 12:38-44