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Acts 1:15-17, 21-26

John 17:6-19

Easter 7B 2021

May 16, 2021

I am praying for you

“I’m praying for them. I’m not praying for the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours.” The Common English Bible translation of John 17:9 highlights one of the most important acts we as Christians do for each other: praying.

Throughout the Easter season we have heard readings from Acts of the Apostles. We have heard how the early church arranged itself and cared for those in the community, especially the most vulnerable. Having a group of leaders to do this work was so important in the church that when Judas betrayed Jesus and the disciples and died, the apostles gathered together to replace him which we heard this morning.

The church from the beginning has organized itself to do the work of the church because the church is our work, not our building. The early church met in people’s homes: a practice that has experienced a resurgence in the past decades as Christians have been drawn to small groups and for some away from large, mainline churches. But between these times of house church, the church as the body of Christ continued to evolve in structure: listening to where the Holy Spirit was leading, who the Holy Spirit was calling into leadership, and responding to the needs of individuals and the community.

Like the wider church, St. David’s has changed in structure over the more than a century when people have met here for prayer, communion, and relationship with each other and God. And during that

time various clergy and lay leaders have guided the church being led by the Holy Spirit, offering to these people and this place the particular talents and gifts God has bestowed upon them. Each clerical leader has agreed to several particular ways of caring for the people of St. David's specifically to "work as a pastor, priest, and teacher."¹ It is this work as a pastor that I want to call attention to this morning.

In the Episcopal Church we do not as commonly refer to priests as pastors, though we certainly could as is common in other traditions. A pastor is a Christian minister or priest having spiritual charge over a congregation or other group. Some here at St. David's would use the term Shepherd. As your pastor, I want to share my hopes for this work here at St. David's and also ask you for the help I need from you all to do this work.

The first work of a pastor, like any Christian's work, is prayer. To pray for those in the community, all of the community both those in need and those who are doing just fine. But prayer alone does not communicate the love of God to God's people. For that we need to talk, to visit, to share communion, and to pray together.

I grew up north of Atlanta. My Grandparents lived in Cadwell, GA, 60 miles south of Macon. At least once a month, if not more often, my family would get in the car on Friday afternoon or Saturday morning and head down to Cadwell. My sister and I would play with our cousins. Run in the fields. Play with the animals. And, there would always come the time in the visit where Mom would ask if we wanted to go visit. This meant driving to downtown Cadwell to visit my great grandmother. We would go and sit and talk. And maybe there would be lemonade and candies in the dish. But the point was to just visit. To be with each other, to hear how things were going.

For the past 10 months I have been visiting those who during Covid are comfortable with outside visitors. Sometimes we have lemonade or tea, sometimes a meal, sometimes we just visit. Sometimes I

¹ BCP page 531. Ordination: Priest

am asked to bring communion or hear confession. Other times, it is like with Grandmother Evans' the point is to visit and hopefully to pray. As we begin to venture out once again into each other's homes, offices, and other gathering places. I want to let you know that I am ready to visit: to hear your stories and get to know you, to share tea or communion, or to pray.

But I want to also let you know that I am here and want to be with you even when you are not up for company. To sit with you after surgery. To pray with you after a loss of a friend or family member. To be with you when you are sick or weak. To be with you in times when you need a pastor and not just to be received as a guest.

When a priest is ordained the bishop addresses the ordinand and gives the following charge: "In all that you do, you are to nourish Christ's people from the riches of his grace, and to strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come."² In my experience the times when I have most needed to be nourished from the riches of God's grace was when I was in need.

Each week on Tuesday or Wednesday, Muff and I talk, meet, or text to talk about the pastoral and prayer concerns in the church this week. Sometimes she will have heard from someone in need of prayer and sometimes I will. I would like to ask the community to begin including both us when asking to be included in the prayers of the community. Not only will this help me with the practical matters of making sure the prayer list is correct for the bulletin, but it will let me know what specifically I can be praying for for you.

There is nothing too small that it cannot be brought to God in prayer. Yes, I want to know you are having surgery but it is also completely appropriate to ask for prayers for your sick cat or dog or for a decision you are trying to make or to talk about that you are struggling with faith or hope.

² ibid

If you are unsure about how to get in touch with me, I will make sure to put all the information in next week's Coracle. I am honored to be your pastor as we continue in the traditions of the early church long ago established and told to us in the book of Acts. Amen.