

St. David's Church
Advent Service
Wednesday 8 Dec. 2010

When Michael asked me to say a few words tonight, it occurred to me that I must find a way to express how grateful I am to have entered a new phase of my life. And because he asked me to verbalize how the course of my life has come full-circle back into the fellowship of the Church, I will attempt to do so with as much brevity and substance as I can.

In essence, this is an opportunity to introduce myself to this congregation since I have only met a few of you face-to-face. In order to do so, I have chosen to borrow terminology that you often hear from Michael in the pulpit, namely the process of "holding on to the thread" and the concept that certain tenets of our tradition become part of our "spiritual DNA."

Yes, there is a thread in our lives that we possess, even though at times we lose awareness of it. It is often found in the subtle awareness that *providence* occurs even when we valiantly try to micro-manage the direction of our lives. It also becomes evident in retrospect when we look back and see a certain inevitability to the flow of life, which emerges even when we fail to prepare for it.

To an extent, the circular nature of my own journey finds affirmation in the experience that I have encountered here at St. David's. Although my spiritual life began in the Calvinistic tradition, my exposure to the Anglican tradition early in my college career at USF in Tampa, Florida fostered a new dimension of spiritual growth. That positive experience led to my confirmation by Bishop Haynes at St. Anselm's Episcopal University Center back in 1974.

As a religious studies major at that time, I became exposed to the thought trends of 20th century liberal theology; this made me aware that there are no simplistic answers to life's basic questions. It became evident that if one wishes to lead a spiritual life, that such an affirmation must exist within the context of science and higher learning.

I did not at that time, nor do I now see a direct conflict between Faith and Science. But it is neither the time nor the place here to belabor the particulars of this realization. The part that does seem relevant is in the awareness that the whole process of personal growth is part of the "spiritual thread" that has led me forward to this time, place and particular opportunity to speak to you.

From time to time I hear Michael refer to the components of our awareness and tradition that have become part of "our Spiritual DNA": When John Locke made reference to the concept of *tabula rasa*, (that is, the concept that the human mind begins as an *empty slate* onto which learning and sensory experience build an edifice of mind and personality), I think a process of spiritual DNA gene-therapy begins from an early age and imprints on the memory:

My own journey began with Mother at my bed-side teaching me to pray "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep..."

Church experience continued to imprint upon my DNA, as thoughtful ladies in Sunday School taught me to sing “Rock of Ages cleft for me, let me hide my self in thee...”

By the time I was 16, I was ready to lay my heart and soul at Jesus’ feet and devote my life to study and application of the tenets of my evangelical roots. At the University, I became aware that fundamentalism bore with it many pitfalls, and that I needed to experience faith in the context of reason and scholarship. At that time, I found a great deal of consolation in the works of C.S. Lewis.

More recent exposure to the writing of Bishop Spong merely affirmed that in order for the Church to maintain relevance in the 21st Century, it must be willing to exist within the full context of reason, historical scholarship, and scientific discovery. Thus, over the term, I have managed to establish a truce between faith and reason that has largely endured until this day. (that is to say in between spates of doubt and a desire to fully secularize my life beyond the confines of the institutional church).

I continue to believe that my personal faith stance must exist on a complex level well beyond the absolute conviction of my early religious training. Part of the beauty of the Anglican tradition and practice is that it gives form to our thought, very much as grammar and syntax give structure to language. Thus, for me, the cumulative effect of the process is that I am still able to come home to the Anglican tradition with full appreciation for the full circle that it represents in my life.

When I left the University, I always foresaw and believed that I would find my way back to the Episcopal Church that I had begun to love back then. Moreover, the circle is more complete because of the warm and welcoming atmosphere of this group, which has made me feel like an integral part of the parish from the beginning.

I like the fact that I get food for thought from Sunday sermons, things that I carry with me throughout the week. But even more so, I am grateful for the way in which the Community of St. David’s creates a support network that invites me to follow the common thread of our experience to its inevitable source in the Creation Cycle, instigated by the Creator untold eons ago.

My own process of “Following the thread” makes me aware that the same Jesus that touched my heart as a child, still speaks to my heart today. He continues to do so, but with less certainty about particular details. I also know that I can never achieve absolute conviction about anything in life, but I can be at peace with the magnificent uncertainty of it all.