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Reflections on the 25th anniversary of Michael Hudson's ministry

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I've told the beginning of this story before—the story of how we came to St. David's. I've told of Paul growing up in a large Catholic church with many large families. Of my growing up in a good-sized Methodist church with a vibrant youth program. I've told of how, when we came to Cullowhee in 2005 from a large Franciscan church in Raleigh, we church-shopped, looking for what we thought we wanted—a large church with lots of young families with young children and a big, active children's/youth ministry. To be honest, we thought we were looking for a church where we could hide in the back but where our children could find friends.

Then Nancie Wilson invited us to St. David's. And Ken Burbank invited us to St. David's. And Pat and Steve invited us to St. David's. But each time we hesitated. St. David's is so small, we said. There were—at the time—very few families with young children.

I'm sure I have replayed for you Pat's response to me one night over dinner: "Yes," she said, "But what if you could go to a small church where your family and your children would be embraced and loved and cared for by the whole community--where they would be adored?" So we came. And what Pat said came true.

I've told that part of the story in this space before. But the part of the story I haven't told is this: the Michael factor.

How the man in the pulpit not only quoted poetry; he was using the works of my favorite writers in his homilies *and* in the liturgy. Wendell Berry. Mary Oliver. William Stafford. Anne Lamott.

How he talked about such interesting things: neuroscience and mushrooms and psychology and music and nature.

I will always remember the image he painted for us one Sunday morning of a kettle of hawks riding the wind currents above Black Balsam. I have never seen such a thing but the image has stayed with me because of the way Michael described it.

Here is a man who brings scripture into the world we live in, the Gospel into God's creation. Here is a naturalist, a photographer, a philosopher, a writer, a pilgrim, and thinker.

Here is a man whose underlying message is always of love. A man who not only speaks of love, but embodies it.

Michael welcomed my children into this community. Many a time at the tail end of coffee hour I have found him sitting on a bench next to Barrett, listening intently as she regales him animatedly with a tale (which was equally likely to be as imaginary as real). Or deep in conversation with shy, reticent Owen.

Michael not only embraced and welcomed our children—he engaged us as well. He invited us to not hide, but to become part of this community and to truly belong. He invited first me and then Paul to join the Vestry. He invited me to be a delegate at conference. I believe he recognized in me a need to

express my faith through service—and so he brought the idea of the Rice and Beans Ministry to me and to the Vinyards, knowing we would run with it.

And when I said to him one day, “I want to bring people together and feed them soup,” he said “Great idea, you go with it.” He supported me wholeheartedly.

Michael has extended his love to our family, celebrating with us, praying with us, welcoming us into the family of St. David’s.

And for that, Michael, I am eternally grateful.