

Annual Rectors Report 2019 The Rev Shannon Leach
AMDG
(For the greater glory of God)

Paul's letter to the church in Corinth fascinates me by its timeless message to the new Christian community in the mid-1st century and its relevance to the Christian communities in every age following. We find the community has been tattling on each other, backstabbing, bragging and other such behavior which brings about division in churches. These problems are addressed by Paul in the same letter containing his treatise on spiritual gifts and love. Written sometime between 53 AD and 2020 the instruction remains relevant to each age.

The letter is written to a very young church - less than 10 years since it's formation - a church just emerging, a church in constant transformation and transition. This is the way of all Christian communities - even Grace - we, like them, are a living organism, a body who is encountering the living Christ as we continually learn to live as part of the Jesus movement. Our Presiding Bishop reminds us that we are the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement and that we are called to be a loving, liberating life giving community whether we are in Las Vegas, Corinth or anywhere in between. And we are always a church in transition and transformation.

We are quite naturally uneasy with change - with transition. We yearn to reach our end with matters already decided and settled. But even when things seem settled, it's only for a short time - only for a season. The body changes, it grows and contracts. Rectors come to the end of their tenure - sometimes quite naturally and for a variety of reasons. But the community - the body - with all their gifts and resources remains.

Now I am aware that this transition can make the body uneasy. It seems that the whole world is changing; it too is in transition - culturally, politically, physically - there is a lot of un-ease. We look to our church to offer shelter from the storm, to offer sanctuary, stability and solace in a challenging and rapidly changing world. And now the Rector is ending his tenure? This can cause some to fear the future as much as cause excitement and expectation. Un-ease can easily turn to dis-ease.

Unease can move the community to be reflective and creative - engaging and renewing as the body questions and examines how it arrived in its present state of readiness to be a loving, liberating, life-giving church. Unease moves the body to discover its shared values as it looks to the next evolutionary step. What will it mean for Grace to live more deeply into its relationship with Christ?

If the unease is not properly tended to - the vacuum of transition can move from unease to dis-ease. Dis-ease can be isolating and alienating, lacking commitment to conversation and creativity. Dis-ease fosters division and individualism - often born of fear - ego - a quest for personal power and a desire to quickly get this over with. But the discernment takes time and constant prayer, a sureness and trust that the only stability we really have is the love of God given to us in Jesus.

As I shared with you last year - my last Sunday at Grace will be the celebration of Christ the King on November 22 of this year. What tools and gifts have we developed that will guide us in living a vibrant life in an un - easy time rather than allowing ourselves to fall into dis-ease. Can we choose to allow the Holy Spirit and not the Spirit of disease to lead and guide us?

The first thing I would ask is to remember that I am still here. I want to enjoy these 10 months. I am with you and I love you desiring to continue the work God has placed before us to teach, preach and heal in Jesus' name, continuing the work of building the kingdom. We are stewards and we know that in the past 7 years the practice of Christian stewardship has been forever changed by our stewardship committee. Our understanding of stewardship has been moved from getting out your checkbook and pay your dues to one of an ongoing conversation with people forming relationships and examining the interrelated nature of those relationships in the currencies we share in our ministry. It is another way to understand the varied gifts of the Spirit coming together to make one body. We are not paying dues; we are building the Kingdom.

One of our major values that revealed itself in the Holy Currency drawing groups is that you actually like to be together and you miss seeing one another on a regular basis. This means that we need to cross pollinate and to continually create new and varied opportunities to come together for celebration and adoration, for picnics and pancakes, for walking together in the labyrinth and in the mountains. I think St. Paul would have liked hanging with the people of Grace.

To live comfortably during days of transition and to embrace our un-ease, we must continue and deepen our life of prayer. Pope Francis recently offered a three-word simple prayer which he believes pleases God (of course God is always thrilled when we pray). Francis asks that we simply say – “If you will” - whenever a need - hope - a fear - a question arises say simply – “If you will”. This prayer conveys trust and faith that God is working his purpose out – “If you will” - and of course God “will”
Remember the words of Jesus -

Do not fear little flock it is the father's
good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.

Grace in the Desert is called to be a loving - liberating - life giving - community dedicated to worship, to education and to works of mercy. So let us be about our business - let us sing, learn, feed, clothe and love in the name of the living Christ.