

STATE OF THE CATHEDRAL ADDRESS  
Postponed Annual Parish Meeting  
*Advent Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> December, A.D.2019*

As I prepared for this address, two verses of Scripture were very much in my mind: One I memorized as an adolescent (hence the language of the King James Version) and the other the verse from which Archbishop Thomas Cranmer drew his collect for Advent Sunday and for the Advent Season.

My home life as a teenager was pretty tumultuous: what succor to my soul when I first registered on this verse read in Eastertide, aged twelve or thirteen!

*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*  
[John 16:33 KJV]

These words proved as reliable as any I had ever heard. They remain my unshakeable reliance. In Jesus there is peace, no matter what the tribulation.

During Seminary, Advent became my favorite Season, especially because of its focus on the end of the story, when Jesus will come again to set everything right. St. Paul provides both the assurance of where we stand in time and an exhortation about how to be ready.

*The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.*  
[Rom 13:12 ESV]

We have had our own night here, but I think the dawn is much nearer now than it once was. Light is the Christian's armor. Our commitment has been to walk in the light. And remember how the Gospel of John begins: The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. [John 1:5] All of this is where we begin at this long-postponed Annual Parish Meeting, on this Advent Sunday, as a new Church Year begins. Amazing timing, don't you think?

Tonight we deal with the business of the parish: the fall of an extraordinary leader and the wounding of many; the stabilization of staff; God's clarifying of our vision and mission as a cathedral church in service to the world; necessary amendments of the bylaws; financial, stewardship and attendance reports; losses and gains in our common life. Our trust in the future God has for us.

The months from August to December were unbelievably difficult for this congregation. The leadership of Senior Warden Budd Kneip was truly God's gift, a wise, faithful and experienced lay leader who knew how to make decisions in a godly way and how to get this family through the worst of its days. He was supported by numerous other lay leaders who rose to the challenge of that season. And there was Fr. Michael who rose to the occasion as the senior staff priest, by his personal presence and pastoral steadiness communicated that St. Peter's would weather those tumultuous days. And there were the other clergy, Fr. Matt and Fr. Wes, and Fr. Jim and Fr. Sudduth, who pitched in to get us through. There were the losses of Fr. Chase Campbell and of Bryan Eltomi (and their dear families). There were also the losses of Belinda, Katharine and Margaret Dudley, the latter two who had grown up among us, all of whom had been valued contributors to our common life. Not a person sitting here today, who was there in those difficult months, is unable to picture the suffering of some they were close to, many who are still with us, but some for whom the pain or confusion was so great that they needed to separate from us.

I began my ministry among you last Advent III, and Nara and I moved here at the beginning of January. My first six months among you were months of listening, listening to you and to those who have left us. We turned our first corner in Holy Week, as the events of Jesus life renewed our hope that joining ourselves to his suffering, and his way of love, is the one unfailingly redeeming way through any trial. Between April and June there were also fourteen neighborhood conversations in which over 300 parishioners participated – including one conversation just for our youth. These were also months of listening to God about what he wanted for this cathedral family.

At the macro level, God showed me and many of us several things:

- 1) That the Cathedral was too personality dependent.
- 2) That we needed to focus on relationships rather than events.
- 3) That we needed to go much deeper into the meaning of what it meant to be a 24/7 follower of Jesus and to be entrusted with the role of "cathedral."
- 4) That mission was everybody's work, and needed to be embraced as deeply as our commitments to worship and discipleship.
- 5) That, in addition to the virtues of faithfulness to God's Word (why we were founded) and extravagant hospitality ("let all our guests be received as Christ himself"), we needed to embrace humility as a core value.

These observations brought us – particularly the vestry, clergy and staff and ministry leaders – to the articulation of a clearer sense of God's vision for the future of St.

Peter's Anglican Cathedral in Tallahassee, and to a clear sense of the most direct way to state our mission (what we have been sent by God to do.)

I am, more than ever, convinced that God's vision for our future is this:

*In worship, discipleship and mission – humbly, faithfully and hospitably – leading the Anglican movement forward.*

I am also convinced that the simplest way to state our mission is to paraphrase that of the Anglican Church in North America:

*Reaching one another, Tallahassee, and the world with the transforming love of Jesus Christ.*

This clarity about vision and mission will enable us to refine all our priorities and systems and initiatives – work that is already underway – and to call a dean who is right for all that lies ahead.

Some of our triumphs – even in these challenging times – have been the following:

In Worship:

- A new pipe organ and a new Book of Common Prayer
- Daily Morning and Evening Prayer, Monday through Friday
- A clearer focus for each of our Sunday services, especially working to see that the 9 am service is held to 75 minutes so that there are always 45 minutes for Sunday School.
- Keeping of Prayer Book Holy (Red Letter) Days eucharistically
- Choral Compline on Wednesday nights (live-streamed across the Province)
- A Memorial Gift that will enable a sixty-seat Chapel in the North Transept.
- The gift of the Liberty Cross (from the original infrastructure of the Statue of Liberty) for a prayer point in the South Transept.

In Discipleship:

- Hiring a Director of Youth Ministries at the loss of Fr. Chase
- Hiring a Parent and Family Ministry Worker
- Two summer Simeon fellows and a new Simeon curate
- Restructuring of Youth Ministry to focus on relationships rather than events, especially through Engage Groups

- Reshaping of Youth Confirmation class to a term-long program with high relational emphasis
- A best (strongest) in the Province acolyte program and continued strong children's and youth choir programs
- The largest ever fall adult discipleship participation
- First efforts at rebuilding a collegiate fellowship
- First efforts at strengthening Acts 2:42 and small group ministry
- A successful English Fayre, when there were thoughts of cancellation
- A re-imagined Easter Vigil reception and a Children's Cross Flowering and Easter Egg Hunt on Easter Day rather than the day before
- Continued VBS and Arts camp programming

#### In Mission:

- Formation of a Mission Engagement Task Force, led by Julie O'Steen and Ken Mayo, to evaluate and strengthen our local, regional, provincial and global mission involvements
- Hosted First Responders Benefit Concert
- Restoration of support and involvement with Grace Mission
- Plans to bring Soul In the City (youth immersion) and short-term mission trips back to prominence for adults and youth
- Increased financial support for the mission of the Gulf Atlantic Diocese
- Pre -Thanksgiving Dinner and Paintball at Boys Town
- Groundwork laid for exploratory team to go to South Rwenzori Diocese, to Ugandan Provincial headquarters and to Uganda Christian University

#### Administration:

- Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats analysis performed
- GRACE Investigation contracted and funded and vestry commitment to follow-up its recommendations
- Staff stabilization
- Comprehensive review of salary structure
- Team environment established (silos dismantled)
- Vestry invited into real partnership in parish leadership and decision-making
- Weekly Rector/Wardens breakfasts begun.

There is so much more that could and should be mentioned – so many whose names could be called out because of their service in these extraordinary and challenging days – but time will not allow it. God knows, and so do you. I praise God for you all.

The finances of the cathedral are strong, as you will hear: building loan continuing to be paid down, future building fund at over 2 million dollars, the 2019 fiscal year ended in the black.

The stewardship picture for 2020 is far more challenging. With 83 pledging units lost, among whom were six of our largest givers (who either left or reduced their commitments) we are presently some 430,000 dollars (or 16%) below what it would take to underwrite the adopted 2020 budget. We have to raise more pledges or will have to make difficult reductions. I trust it will be the former rather than the latter, but that will take the prayers, effort and generosity of all of us. Look at the good news in the stewardship report as concerns the coming year: 48 new pledges, 139 raised pledges and 120 of our households committed to tithing.

Losses in Sunday attendance are also revealing. On average in the Sundays from June to November, comparing 2017 with 2019. We are down 149 souls each Sunday, with attendance totals that had been between 700 to 800 on a Sunday to 550 to 650 in the last six months. The Vestry has taken action to improve our communications capabilities to once again attract significant visitors (potential members) by upgrading our video equipment such that – beginning at Christmas – we will be able to live-stream services; by contracting for an electronic sign at the southern end of our property – where bulletins about services, classes, concerts and daily offerings can be communicated to the thousands who pass by daily; and has approved a marketing plan for social, print and televised media – featuring human interest stories. We also have the opportunity to reach out – all of us – to those who have needed a season away and to gently, humbly and lovingly invite them back or to pastorally inquire after them in their new church homes. God is good: All the time. All the time: God is good. Pruning is painful. We have been pruned. The Father's purpose, as Jesus teaches in John 15, is for even greater fruitfulness, provided we are on the right side of the pruner's cut.

We will also have a look tonight about how the Search Process for the next Dean will unfold.

God is good: All the time. All the time: God is good. Throughout my time here I have consistently said to the vestry – and to other leadership – that when we do what is right with our energies and our resources – God will do what is right in his care for us. He is a God who provides for us in ways that exceed our imagining. Bishop Alf Stanway – the missionary bishop of Tanganyika and first dean of Trinity School for Ministry (Ambridge) – used to say that “God’s work, done in God’s way, will have God’s resources.” That has been Trinity’s experience for more than forty years. That was my experience as Bishop of (post-industrial) Pittsburgh, and as gatherer of the Anglican Church in North America (the latter, a miracle of which the St. Peter’s miracle is also a part.) That will also be our experience here: God’s work done in God’s way, will have God’s resources. So we just have to get on with God’s work, and to do it even more consistently in God’s way.

I believe we see God’s vision, and though chastened are not deterred: “In worship, discipleship and mission: leading the Anglican movement forward.” And we see the simplicity – and the boldness – of our mission: “To reach one another, Tallahassee, and the world with the transforming love of Jesus Christ.”

If this is what the next year is about, “all will be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”

Faithfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Duncan".

The Most Rev’d Robert Duncan, D.D.  
Bishop in Residence  
*Locum Tenens* of St. Peter’s

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