

3 June 2018

Some of you may remember how my predecessor, the late Father Jim Curtis, would from time to time announce, "We'll let the gospel speak for itself." All things consider, today is a very good day to follow his precedent.

I don't think there is any surprise when I tell you I was not keen about this sabbatical. The reason was simple: You are my family, and I love being here with you in this holy place. To be away was intimidating because I grew up embracing my father's belief that work is the best kind of fun. But being here is more than work - it is my answering God's call to vocation and service. For me, this is a vocation that is pure joy.

So, I begin by quoting Winston Churchill, who, one day, stood up in Parliament and said, "There have been many occasions when I have had to eat my words, and on the whole, I found them a very tasty meal." Because of the very rocky and tense beginning, and because so many of you were troubled and hurt as a result, I truly apologize for my part in it, and can only ask and hope you will forgive me.

Despite that rocky beginning for many of us, some very good things have come out of the past three months. I never cease to be astounded at how so much of life can almost look like those connect the dots books we had as children. At first the broad canvas of life looks like a bunch of random numbers, but then God seemingly puts the pencil in our hand and invites us to connect the dots to create something very wonderful and beautiful.

I believe that is what we have and are and will be experiencing. For me, it began with the final reading of our 150th commemorative book, *Built to Last*. Every time I look at it I am reminded of how this parish, through God's grace, has flourished through wars, financial recessions and depressions, and a community which reinvented itself from a trading post along the river to a lumber town, to a fishing village, to fruit growing, and more recently an art and tourist community. There is such vibrancy in this parish and in the wider community.

Because I had copious amounts of time when the weather was still filthy, I settled into reading the three volume set by John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*. Ruskin was the great philosopher behind what became the Arts and Crafts Movement. Ruskin influenced William Morris, Morris influenced Gordon Lloyd, and Lloyd designed our beautiful church.

It was the second volume that caught my attention because the dots from the 1853 connect with All Saints of 2018. A major portion of the book was a detailed explanation of the medieval guilds - stone masons, wood carvers, brewers and bakers, cloth makes, and metal workers. A young man, and it was a young man because the opportunities were not open to women, was apprenticed to, for example, a cabinet maker. At first his work was menial - sweeping, fetching tools, and gradually learning the different types of woods and their uses. Different tools and their uses, and so on. Over the course of seven years he learned by watching and doing. In time he became a journeyman, advancing in his proficiency, and at the end of seven years he was granted permission to stay on or to journey to another city and become a cabinet maker there. And perhaps in time he opened his own shop as a master woodworker.

Learning the trade and skills was just part of it. Even as a youngster he was invited to attend the meetings held in the guild hall - the lodge, as it was called then. At first he listened and learned, and in time he was invited to ask questions, and near the end of his 14 years of training, younger members would turn to him for answers. They worked together with loyalty and communication.

Ruskin pointed out that there were three strengths of the guilds - proficiency and excellence in work, but also loyalty to his guild and the importance of open communication. Excellent work and attention to detail, loyalty to fellow members, and clean and open communication. The line was drawn, as I said from Ruskin to All Saints, because I realized he was telling the story of our Altar Guild.

One truly blessed day, Marge and Cynthia Sorensen became the newest members of the Altar Guild, learning from more experienced members. Decades later, Cynthia is Mistress of the guild; there are long-time journeywomen such as Lexi, Dale Ann, Mary,

and others. And now, it is Jan Tripp who continues the cycle as one of the newest member. More than that, whenever they have a polishing festival, the members openly talk with one another - sharing ideas, caring for each other, being together.

We have the finest example of loyalty and communication right in front of us, because loyalty to one another, to this parish, and above all to Jesus, and open communication is the greatest strength of any organization.

And then, near the end of these three months you participated in the Congregational Assessment Tool - the ecclesiastical version of a CAT Scan. A little under two weeks ago I met with the facilitator and others and we reviewed the results. The line was drawn connecting more dots.

I truly believe that survey and the timing was God's grace. For over a decade, ever since we began the End of the Ice Age and Ward Dobbin laid out a 30 year facilities plan, we have worked on the building and grounds. We insulated, got rid of the glaciers on the roof, got rid of the mould problem in basements, insulated, repaired windows, and every exterior board is painted. The last major task has been the roof.

God's house on this location is in better shape than it has been in a century and a half. Now, we work to maintain it, as we shift our attention.

No wonder when I saw the report and listened to Susan, there is such a desire to put our faith into action, to give deeply of ourselves and our resources, and to do God's will as practical, practicing Christians.

The more I thought about it, the more I saw another line connecting dots, this one from Connecticut in 1789. Four young Yale College students were walking home for their summer holiday when they were over-come by a storm, and they took shelter in a hay mown. While they were there they pledged to each other that when they got to their hometowns, they would offer to teach Bible study classes.

They kept their word, but things didn't go as expected.

God touched the lives of people that summer, and this time lay people started asking What would Jesus have us do? What would Jesus do? They turned to the four young

men for advice, but all four said, "We have to go back to Yale. You figure it out. You prayerfully consider how you can put your faith into action here in this village."

They did, and a wildfire of applied Christianity spread across the country. Hungry people in their own community had food, warm clothing, and a place to live. Robert Raike's idea of Sunday school where the Bible was used to teach children and adults how to read, was imported. There were people who were sick - nursing care was provided. There were people with debilitating mental illnesses or what we now would call dementia who were warehoused - the crazy aunt locked up in the attic. Nursing homes were created. There were reforms in the prison systems.

Someone realized that America was expanding west - Daniel Boone was leading pioneers into Kentucky; others into the Ohio Valley. Those pioneers needed churches and clergy, and the clergy needed to be supported, and in a country that was less than a decade old, missionaries were being sent.

Others took on the sinful wickedness of slavery, leading into the abolition movement. Still others were horrified at the high rate of substance abuse, and took action.

Many of you have seen the musical Hamilton, and you know the story. A Vice President and the former Secretary of the Treasury had their infamous duel. Dueling had been going on since the beginning of history, but finally, this caught people's attention. Reverend Lyman Beecher began preaching against gun violence, and he made it clear that this had nothing to do with party politics. He didn't care if someone was a Whig, Federalist, or Democrat. Good Christians must not vote for any candidate who refuses to stop the gun violence, and if they don't do anything, they must be turned out of office.

This was the Second Great Awakening, and it lasted from 1789 to April 1917, when America entered the war in Europe. That was a little over a century ago. What if, just what if, God is telling us, "It's time. Get started at All Saints. Even if others don't join in, launch the Third Great Awakening and put into practice what you believe and affirm. You've got every possible resource you could possibly need. You need something more,

have faith because I'll provide it. With prayer, loyalty to me and one another, with listening to my Son, you'll know what to do."

And the next step, as I understand it, is when the focus groups are convened, and the Holy Spirit will lead us into putting our faith and all our resources into action.