

Lent 1, Year B

February 22, 2015

*“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”*

Some folks have a funny superstition. You may have heard someone say it or you may have said it yourself. It is when someone says “Everything is going well, remarkably well.” The superstition is to warn that person, “You better knock on wood.” The underlying belief is that we do not want to awaken the universe to the fact that everything is going so well in our lives. It is as if the universe would notice and say, “Hmmm… better do something about that. Let’s knock out their power.”

Do you ever feel that way? Sometimes our life is going well and we can just breathe and say “Thank you.” For those of us in a difficult time, we may wonder if we will ever get there again. We pray for grace to get through and we often draw closer to God as we face our challenges. But when things are going well, there can be another type of challenge—we may not only forget to knock on wood; we may forget the source of all our blessings and wander away from the path God has called us to follow.

That is why it is good that we are having our *Building to Serve* Gala—a joyful celebration of our common life and ministry and our hopes for a successful expansion—on this first Sunday of Lent.

This day is an odd juxtaposition of penitence and celebration which is outside of our custom (I even asked the bishop’s permission to have the gala today).

But this special day can also serve as a needed reminder of that cycle of our life and faith—that deep joy often grows from the soil of sorrow and repentance. Jesus had a similar juxtaposition in the Gospel we heard today. In only two verses, Jesus went from being called God’s Beloved to being tempted by Satan in the wilderness.

What a strange development. Even stranger, we’re told that it was the Spirit driving him away from his lovely experience with God to his scary encounter with the one who would question all that God had just said. Something in the very nature of life and faith requires us to be challenged in order to grow into the next stage of what God wants for us and for the world.

So on this day in the history of our parish, we have a lot to celebrate and a lot to remember that will be an important part of our future life and ministry.

Today, during the gala, we will announce an exciting figure of what has been raised so far during the advance commitment stage of our capital campaign. I think we will all be joyously surprised

(I just about fell over when I saw the number!). That number is an outward sign of the inner grace that God has provided to us for this expansion. Today we will get to see a video with different members of our parish of all ages and backgrounds telling us why our church is important to them and also what their dreams are for the future of our parish after the expansion. As we hear from them, we will be touched by how important this community is for parishioners and for the people who are not members that we still connect with and serve because of our faith in Jesus Christ.

At the end of the video, we will feel affirmed and grateful. We will also feel challenged to hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people and be open to what may come next. The truth is I am not sure exactly what will come next. Things are going so well now that if I was superstitious, I might say, "We better knock on wood." But I am not superstitious. I am probably like a lot of you—a combination of realistic and prayerful. I know things will come up that will challenge us and I trust in a God that has brought us this far and that will continue the good work that God has begun in each of us and all of us as a community of faith.

One challenge, I am pretty sure, will be the details of our expansion. If everything goes perfectly, we will at the least be inconvenienced for several months. We will have a muddy parking lot. Some of the entrances will be closed for weeks at a time. For a time, the upstairs bathrooms will not be available. We may even have to worship outside or in another location. At first, it will be charming and exciting, but I imagine at some point even the cheeriest of us might become annoyed. That will be a challenge. But I believe we can grow through that challenge. Most of us can adapt and endure for six or nine (or twelve) months. Like going into the wilderness, our journey through this expansion will help us know what we're made of. When we are challenged by any of those inconveniences—and maybe by some that we didn't expect—we can remember the joy of this day and our confidence in God's love for us and the goal we are working toward so that we can endure the headaches and challenges.

Another important part of what's next for us is a different type of challenge. It is the challenge of who we are after we expand. This will take various forms. One is that we plan to grow. We will have more guests and friends coming to check us out. Several may become members. There will be people we don't know now and the social dynamics of this place will change. That is not a bad thing—but it will be different. How will that growth affect our positive feelings about this community?

I am confident that the change will be good for us. The new people will be a gift, like all of us were a gift to the community when we arrived. There will be new friendships that develop. People will be added as participants in ministries. Some of the new folks will help us discover expanded and creative ways to serve. It will be exciting. But we will need to be intentional in how we invite, welcome, involve, and integrate the people who come. I have asked members of the vestry to form working groups to look at how we do those important functions. Some of you will be asked to help with this.

The last “what’s next” is what God is calling us to do and to be in Forsyth County and beyond. We have some hints that are exciting—

- our work at the Children’s Center at Lee Arrendale State Prison;
- our agreement to be a support parish for Family Promise which will provide transitional housing for homeless families;
- our contemplative service on Wednesdays at Noon.

Some of these changes will come almost naturally, like the way Backpacks of Love just took off (with faithful shepherding from Cathy Schlecht). But some may come out of leftfield, so to speak. We may not even be able to imagine now what will come next for us. That is exciting, too. So as we celebrate today, let’s truly enjoy the moment. We are going to have a great meal at a fancy location. None of us are going to have to cook or serve or clean up (some of us will be working, but not many and not for long). We will be hearing some exciting news and hearing from people we love about what they appreciate today and hope for in our future.

And we will be asked to pray and consider the important question, “Lord, what do you want to do through me?” I am grateful to be your priest and your companion on this exciting journey.

God bless you. Amen.