

“One Day at a Time” says the slogan from AA. This is a good distillation of old spiritual teachings from the Christian Tradition. It lengthens out to “You just do what God has put in front of you today. That’s enough to handle. Let God look after the other days”. Good advice.

The Gospel today has it too, embedded in a way that only the Wednesday Bible Study Group could dig up. Here is John the Baptist. God has told him to baptize people. “Have them name the brokenness of their lives and let the water wash it away, and then pull them up into life, forgiven and free. This is getting them ready for the One who comes after you.” And that was all John got. He didn’t know who that One was, just that he was more powerful, more wonderful and so great that John wouldn’t feel good enough even to hold his sandals. And that was all John really was sure ofuntil , the next day, he saw Jesus coming. Then he knew who was the One to come after him. From then on he just pointed people to Jesus and faded out of the story.

So what about us in Grace Church? Here we are just beginning our story, and what has God told us to do? What I was told was a vision. Grace is to be a new church. Not a new building only, but a new Church in a new building. And why bother to do this? Well because by the time Grace is built the population of that part of town is set to grow. High-density building will be starting soon and people will be moving in around the new transit hub at Kennedy and Eglinton. Who will be there to offer them the presence of Christ? That is our calling. And why will they hear us, when people have gradually stopped hearing the voice of the Anglican Church? Because we are doing it, speaking it, singing it and living it differently from the ways we have done so in the past.

I want to hold before you the way that vision might look as I imagine it. After all this is still the new year season of the Church in Advent, and this is a time to dream about the future and start to set the compass of your soul for the journey you hope, with God, to make.

I see the Church from three angles. I see it as a place of worship and teaching. I see it as a place of community, family and healing grace. And I see it as a place of outreach and service.

In worship I know we need to move beyond the patterns and traditions that have nurtured us, but are largely failing to hold holiness for a new generation of Canadians. We like our old fashioned hymns and our books and our funny furniture. Largely they become more lovely with age, as they gain ever more memories to hold for us. We love the way they remind us of the time we first fell in love, or first glimpsed a new depth of God’s mystery, or when we survived a tragedy through God’s help. The old and familiar become friends we want never to die as others grow old and die. So we cling to them. I was teasing Jim Daffern last week when he showed me a coat stand in St George’s hall storage room. He said we should bring it to the new church. He saw an old friend. I saw a rusted, old, bent thing I wouldn’t have in my house, let alone the house of God, and bluntly told him so. Jim is a good-natured soul and kindly didn’t hit me with it. We need a coat rack that says “We want to offer you the best, because we think you are the best in God’s eyes!” The best for this generation is different from the best for a generation ago. Standards have changed and expectations have increased. Excellence is the standard. Clean and fresh is the level of the rooms, the seating, the lighting. New and of today is the requirement for the language, music and feel of the service that we need to be aiming for. When people meet us in worship it must be clean, fresh, vibrant, relevant to their lives and uplifting. It must be holy. It must have room for God’s Spirit to blow into our hearts,

We still will have prayers that have been proved by the test of time, but rewritten into today’s Canadian English. We will still sing and share bread and wine, but sing new songs and in new ways. We will still, most importantly, come together to be before God, to ask forgiveness, to hear God speak to us, to seek healing for ourselves and others, and to offer thanks and praise. We will come to church to be sent out changed, blessed and strengthened that we may carry little pieces of Christ out into a world in need of him.

In community, we are called to be communities of compassion and hope. That was said at the Synod last week and it struck me with that loud sound that I have come to recognize as a Word of the Lord to me; “**communities of compassion and hope.**” Compassion recognizes that each of us needs a little tenderness, a bit of support and a degree of encouragement as we trundle along life’s highway. And we need to treat each other with tenderness, support and compassion. These have to be the rules of our community as we welcome each other as family and friends. Church has to be, absolutely has to be SAFE! When you come into the house of God you should know that you will be safe. Every time we snipe at each other, or shame a person, or criticise and hurt another, we do it to Christ. This is Gospel teaching, “as much as you do this to others you do it to me” says the Lord. Even more so for the visitor. Each stranger coming in we must welcome as if it were Jesus himself. Welcoming must become one of the most important ministries of Grace Church. We will need people at the doors on Sunday morning to greet and guide and accompany people through their first experience of Church. When they leave they need to know that they have been noticed, delighted in, welcomed, introduced to people like themselves, and that next week the person who greeted them will be waiting expectantly for them to come again. And they need to know that here they will find friends, new uncles and aunts, new parents to guide them, and new people who will need their help.

In this fast-paced and changing world, where people move house and home and work, the hunger for community, for lost families to be replaced, and for love in the safety of the teaching and rule of Christ’s gentle Way, is like cool water to the thirsty soul.

In outreach we need to get busy again. Jesus taught that in bread and wine we could find him again in worship. He told us that when we wanted to be with him we had to gather in his name, and there he would be. He said, thirdly, that every time we reach out to the broken, the lost and the hungry we reach out to him. It is good to send money to far off places, and to support those who care for others. But if we want to meet Jesus again we need to look for him in the eyes of the people who live at the edges. We need to turn our cooking skills towards feeding the hungry, our hospitality towards a bed for those exhausted by life on the streets. Healing is not only prayers, but foot care for the limping woman, nursing for the chronically sick, friendship for the mentally and emotionally battered. It is a sacrament of Christ’s presence when you serve those who can never pay you back, and you do it without hope or expectation of reward.

We at Grace Church are rich. We have Protestant and Catholic traditions to draw from. We have people with evangelical and charismatic faith mixed in with us. The whole church, not just a slice of it, is here in this community. It is not a competition to see which faction wins. It is not bells and incense versus prayer books and memorials. It both sides supporting each other. In the same way the simple direct experience of knowing Jesus as Lord in the evangelical tradition, makes liturgies alive. And the rather stuffy side of Anglican good taste, that is our delightful British heritage, is blessed by those who see miracles as matters of daily reality. We can build a balanced and whole Church which welcomes anyone, not just those who suite our “club”.

Lastly I see us practicing that teaching of Jesus who said that when we live for ourselves we die, but when we die to ourselves we live in him. When Grace Church moves into the new building on Kennedy Road we come out of the wilderness of John’s life of getting ready, and enter the new ministry of being Apostles of the Lord Jesus.

But back to how little John knew... “one day at a time”. John knew where he was and which way he had to point. What I have expressed is my sense of direction. How the Lord will lead and guide us there we have yet to be shown. We all want to know the answers to the detailed questions, but I think God says to me, to us, “You just do what I have put in front of you today. That’s enough to handle. Let me look after the other days.”

So let us wait, with Mary, to see what is given, with John, to see who will arrive, with one another to see who God will make us into for the sake of his son, Jesus, the Lord.