

As the future happens

**Sermon at Trinity Mt. Pocono, Bishop Paul V. Marshall
Pentecost 7, Proper 8, June 29, 2008**

We come, Lord God, after all is said and done, to the end. May the Holy Spirit be present in a way that allows us to acknowledge and master our many emotions and move into your future. Amen.

It has been an interesting and instructive task to decide on something to say today that would not sound like leftovers or remind anybody of the designated hitter rule.

I say that because you have already had a party, a testimonial dinner, so to speak, to honor and celebrate a ministry marked by productivity and joy. Many wise and appreciative words have been said to and about Canon Day with great sincerity, privately and publicly. I also suspect there may have been one or two funny stories told; do not ask me how I know this.

Perhaps what can appropriately be said today during this Holy Eucharist was hinted at in your first Christmas together, as I was reminded by a Trinity parishioner last week. It was bleak midwinter, long, long, ago, and there was no organist or hope of one for that first Christmas that Trinity celebrated with its new rector. However, while traveling between the churches where he was to play the organ, Tom Salmon realized he had a spare few minutes, so he slipped into the Trinity and at just the right moment plowed into the Anglican Communion's second signature hymn, "O Come All ye Faithful." The crowd, as they say, went wild.

Ginny's response was "I love surprises."

It isn't the perfect poise of such a remark, it isn't the entirely characteristic charm of such a remark that leads me to remind you of it.

I remind you of it because it is the way to put positively what is true about the lessons today and about the ministry you and The Reverend Canon Virginia Rex Day have shared over the years.

When you trust God and move ahead with spiritual integrity, new things happen. Quite lovely things.

I have watched with gratitude as Trinity has become a more and more inclusive church. I have watched as your sense of mission has grown. I have appreciated how your parish leadership increasingly values its function as a spiritual opportunity. I have appreciated how together you have deepened the experiences of personal and liturgical spirituality, indoors and outdoors. I have been grateful as your ecumenical involvements increasingly mean people getting their hands dirty with and for others. I have also watched with admiration as continuing challenges have been met with consistent grace, charity and integrity.

What I see in your rector is a woman who has had the courage to stick to her vision even and perhaps especially when that has been inconvenient. It is never popular to side with the marginalized. It is never popular to insist that people keep talking to and praying with each other when they would rather take sides. It is never popular to lead people, however gently, out of their comfort zones. Even into the kingdom of God.

But that is where the surprises come from! And thank God they have come.

In the longer version of our gospel passage, Jesus says once again that the key to the big surprises is letting go of self in service to the Lord. That requires a kind of faith, security and confidence that I believe you have seen in your rector.

I'm in a tough spot here, because Ginny is alive and well. I want to congratulate her and publicly celebrate the core of this ministry without suggesting that she is looking very natural this morning. As her colleague and as your bishop, though, I simply have to emphasize that what I cherish most about this time you have had together is the core of solid faith expressed in a disciplined charity towards others that has embraced the stranger and the friend. Her style of ministry has reminded us all that when St. James wrote "be ye kind one to another," he was on to much more than a throw-away line. He was on to what all our theology looks like in easy times and

in the face of difficulty.

The charm, the poise, the wit, the liturgical presence work because they are all in service of the central mystery, that having surrendered himself for us, Jesus rose to a reality in which we find meaning on the most practical of levels.

That's why this is a celebration and not a wake: today's liturgy marks the conclusion of what has been authentic and honorable, and accordingly graced with wonderful surprises.

Another story looms in this week's lessons, though, doesn't it? It's that first lesson from Genesis. As modern people we very rightly hear the story of Abraham and Isaac with sheer terror, and we cannot take that out of our brains.

Besides the sheer horror of losing a child, Abraham heard a call to surrender the only evidence he had that God was keeping his promises. In binding Isaac he had to let go of that small evidence that big promises were being kept. He discovered that God was there for them both.

There is a kind of blindly letting go for parish and for priest today. This rectorship really is over—Ginny cannot be your back-up leader in the days to come. We ask retired clergy to keep their distance for two years, and return at the sole discretion of the next rector. That is for everyone's sake and especially for Ginny and Charley's.

It's easy to say, but harder to do. Trinity and Canon Day each have to let go of each other in a way that trusts God to see Trinity through the next stage of its life.

What is it like for a leader to lay down her leadership of a community she loves? What is it like for a parish to say goodbye to a rector who has been with them through thick and thin, a person on whom they know they can rely? Although nothing is being killed, we get to know a little of what Abraham was doing in entrusting what and whom he loved entirely to God.

Well, I imagine that it's a little tough. At the same time, here is where

the Old Testament and the Gospel come together. In each passage the central idea is that when we give up control, God can step in. Easter comes after Good Friday because life does not work any other way.

That is a difference between us and Abraham. We know how the story comes out. All that we have just celebrated from Palm Sunday until Pentecost gives us the confidence to make the parting we make today. We can do it with faith: God's will is done among those who seek it.

So in our letting go, in the trusting of God, the welcome future is allowed to happen for both Trinity and for Ginny and Charley. And there will be more surprises for everybody.

God bless you all as the future happens.