

2 Easter April 11 2010

Acts 5:27-32

Psalm 118:14-20

Revelation 1:4-8

John 20.19-31

May the words of my mouth and the  
SECRET meditations of our hearts be always  
acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our  
strength and our redeemer. AMEN

Many years ago Bruce, bishop of Bathurst  
New South Wales introduced me to this  
adaptation of the Bible verse. In its origin,  
there is no 'secret'.. but in our world, we have  
found that each of us has thoughts and  
questions we are afraid to share with others,  
and maybe even with ourselves. If we keep  
them hidden, buried deep in our minds and  
hearts then God's healing power can not  
reach them.

After the announcement that I would be in  
Monticello for 6 weeks a number of you  
spoke about the sadness

Then this week St. John's heard news that  
shocked many people. Fr. Abshire has  
resigned suddenly and without a clear  
explanation and next week will be his last  
Sunday with us.

A few of the questions that have been asked  
already ...

What is happening at St. John's?  
Why is this happening all at once?  
Why didn't we know?  
Why doesn't anyone tell us anything?  
Why are the clergy deserting us?  
What part does the bishop play in all of this?

You may have other secret questions, secret  
meditations; like what is wrong with me..

what is wrong with us that clergy seem to desert us, leave us feeling forsaken?

Jesus cried out “Oh, God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ....And (why) are (you) so far from my cry and from the words of my distress?”

Some of us are crying out “O God, our God, why are you forsaking us?”

Yes, it may seem like even God is deserting St. John’s.

Only a few days ago, these words were heard several times as we worshiped during Holy Week, but remember.. the Psalmist goes on to say..

“Our forefathers put their trust in you, they trusted you and you delivered them

Be not far away, O Lord.. you are *our* strength; hasten to help *us*..”

Last night I heard a comment on radio relating to the proverb “it takes a village to raise a child” that went like this..

“If you need a village.. build a village.”

St. John’s is our village. It has been bashed and battered. Forces have tried to destroy us. Lack of communication has divided us. And as others hear the latest news.. They may “laugh us to scorn”.

Some people may believe we will lie down and die; that it is all over for St. John’s. And deep in the secret recesses of our own hearts we may wonder the same thing. What is happening to us? To St. John’s? Why is it happening again?

We love St John's, even battered as it is. So we must rebuild.

To rebuild any village takes time, energy, and commitment. In our case it also will take open communication, respect and compassion, forgiveness and God's healing.

St Paul tells us that all have sinned and done wrong. Yes, in some little way, each of us is complicit in where we are now.

We have sinned as individuals as well as committees or groups. Our pride has us thinking our own efforts are the most important. Our greed become visible as we work out the budget. So many unannounced groups continue to meet, while curious members complain of their secrecy. And the gossip and rumors spread.

These are some of the sins of our 'secret meditation', sins that control our words and our actions.

All of us, individuals as well as groups need to be working toward one well defined vision. Rebuilding the village of St. John's will take commitment from each of us. We need to work on better communication, increased respect, further hospitality, and strengthening justice.

We begin by forgiving anything and anyone in the 'village' who has hurt us.

Impossible? No. We ask God to show us those we need to forgive...we make the decision to forgive.. and then 'with God's help,' we do forgive.

It may happen instantly.. but more often it is like taking antibiotics.. it needs time.. God's time.. we need to ask again and again, before

we realize how God is working deep in our hearts, making the meditations, even the secret meditations acceptable to God.

With April 18<sup>th</sup> being Fr. Abshire's last Sunday, Bishop Howard decided I was needed more at St John's, and arranged for someone else to supply at Monticello. I was very pleased with the new arrangements.

Maybe in our meditations this information brings a glimmer of hope..

And maybe with this glimmer, together we can find a suitable vision for St. John's, not just to survive, but to thrive.

With this glimmer let us establish what we want our 'village center' to look like.. to be.. and then determine how what we have been doing supports that vision, and if need be, change direction a little.

In my time here at St. John's I have found it hard to find the center. I find the many groups working hard and doing God's work, but as single units, fractured; too many tangents.. no center.

In a clarified, vision, with specific goals I would like to include things like:

- open and honest communication
- respect and compassion for every human being.
- hospitality for all,
- a commitment to social justice and peace..

Moreover everything we do, should always be under-girded by 'the apostles teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers'.

Once our vision is clarified, we need to set clear goals. We should avoid wasting time and energy on tangents; instead find ways to support our center.

During the next few weeks we will be grieving Fr Abshire's leaving and supporting him and his family in their new endeavors..

In Fr. Abshire's absence we may be wondering what the bishop has in mind for us.

But only we can rebuild the battered, fractured village of St. John's.  
Let's clarify is our vision.  
Define our center.  
Set specific achievable goals  
Solidify our place in the living tradition of the Episcopal Church.

Share with me and/or the vestry, your thoughts about our vision and goals so that in surviving, St. John's will thrive.

As I think about our situation I am reminded of the song "I will survive".

"I will survive.. Hey hey  
It took all the strength I had not to fall apart  
Kept trying hard to mend the pieces of my broken heart...And so I spent many nights, just feeling sorry for myself.. I used to cry, but now I hold my head up high...did ya think I'd lay down and die, Oh no I will survive, long as I know how to love I know I'll stay alive".

We have just celebrated the Resurrection.

God loves US.  
Jesus died and rose for US.  
Let us learn from God's love how to love each other so like the psalmist we can say..

"We shall not die, but LIVE, and declare the works of the Lord."

