



A-Baptism-Annual Meeting, January 13, 2008  
St. Luke's, Renton  
Kevin Pearson, Preacher

This is the Sunday of our Annual Parish Meeting and my intention is to weave together our liturgy and the meeting later today. My homily, or address at this point is the main thing I have to say to you today.

This is neither a "State of the Church" address nor a campaign pitch, but rather an opportunity to say what I've been saying since I came to St. Luke's in 2004. Things that should be said, should be said over and over again. I want to tell you what I'm about and what I'm doing here.

But first, since it's still kind of the season, I want to tell you a Christmas joke.

It seems that God was recently blowing off some steam with a friend and complaining about how demanding the work had been lately and how much he needed a break. His friend said, "Why don't you take a little vacation time?" "How about visiting Mars for awhile?"

God said, "No, no ... too cold, I don't want to go to Mars.

His friend said, "How about Earth? I hear it's nice this time of year."

And God said," with a twinkle in his eye, "Ah, I better not do that, I was there 2000 years ago, and got jiggy with a nice Jewish girl, and the people there are still talking about it."

Today is the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus--the fruit of that little visit, and we're still talking about it! We're still talking about it because baptism is the path that you and I take in order to say that we are committed to this life of faith stuff, and to our ministries as part of the Body of Christ. It's the ritual path we take that affirms that we are God's beloved people.

If you want to pare it down, that's what I'm here for as the priest of this parish: to tell people, and to remind us all over and over and over again, that we are beloved children of God.

Actually, while I like that turn of phrase, in truth, we are God's, whether we are children, young people, or as old as the hills. We are all called to become mature people, adults who are increasingly able to stand on our own two feet and to stand by each other in solidarity, being the strength for one another and for the world when we're needed. We're called to become adults who are grown-up enough to play like children and pray like fools. As a priest I am among you to continually point (!) to the Divine Life who lives and loves among us in this life.

Then I have this other role of being the rector of the parish, which is *almost* as fun. The word comes from the Latin word *regere* and means "ruler." The problem I have with that word is its connotation of having power over people. I prefer to think that my role as rector means I am to keep the rules of our common life.

All monastic communities have a rule of life—principles by which the community lives together. When a community fails to keep the rule, when members decide to live based upon how members feel in the moment, there is a strong tendency for the community to become anxious, contentious and lax in its mission. When people begin keeping their own set of rules, or when an individual demand that the community be ordered around his particular desires, the



whole project can be threatened. Keeping the rule is about keeping the principles by which the community celebrates its life together.

The same applies to parish churches. We have principles too—ways for us to be in relationship with each other, though they are less clearly defined than in monastic communities. We are ordered and ruled, supported and challenged by the celebration of Eucharist with one another. Here we proclaim the good news of God's love, we seek to see God face to face in the tangible forms of bread and wine and in each others faces. We are sacraments to one another of the love of God. If I let that sink in, I realize that that is a gracious, yet demanding rule. At the same time, we are communities of forgiveness and grace that comes to us unearned (and sometimes unbidden). If I let that sink in, I realize that that is a gracious, yet demanding rule.

You and I are called to be on a path of faith that actually goes somewhere! This is not Groundhog Day, waking up in the same circumstance every day. We are, each and all, on a journey, a pilgrimage of faith where we are ever being transformed by grace. We are ever growing up into the "full stature of Christ"—become adults of God. And that too is a gracious, yet demanding rule.

My job is to keep track of these rules, these principles, and to faithfully observe them and hold them before us all. And I know that my biggest challenge and biggest task is simply striving to observe these principles myself.

Remember that great quote from Mahatma Gandhi who said, "I have only three enemies. My favorite enemy, the one most easily influenced for the better, is the British Empire. My second enemy, the Indian people, is far more difficult. But my most formidable opponent is a man named Mohandas K. Gandhi. With him I seem to have very little influence."

When I'm at my best, I know that *my* work is me. *Your* work is you. And God give us the patience and kindness to cope with our task.

As rector and keeper of the rule of our common life, I have an important leadership role. I think of myself as a leader among leaders of the parish, both because I don't want to "rule" in the sense of overpowering anyone or manipulating people and because I believe that the strongest form of leadership is about getting people to take responsibility for themselves and to take leadership in the ways that God has gifted them. I want you to exercise the leadership that your gifts inspire.

Together we have a ministry, we have a calling, we have a challenge, we have an opportunity to make a difference in Renton and in the world. Here's how that will happen: it will happen by each of us finding within ourselves, within our relationships with God, and within our life together, the juice to be the gift God has given us to be. There may be times that we can bundle those gifts together and make them more powerful, like in the way we helped create ARISE—our traveling homeless shelter. But for the most part, each one of us wakes up each morning and has a ministry before us. And the grace with which we live that out will make all the difference.

So what we do here at St. Luke's is to kindle fire and fan the flame of God's love. The enterprise of the gospel is what you take from your lives and from this place and apply it wherever you go. And I have a sneaking hunch that the more our focus is on being the church in the world, the more our church will flourish. The more we focus on being God's hands and heart in the world, the more people will want to come here and get juiced up for their witness and ministry.

This here is a rest stop and a filling station, not a shrine at the end of our journey.



There's another thing that shifts with this perspective. While I was called to be your priest and rector and while I love this time and experience we're having, this is not about me. It's not even really about you and me. If I'm doing my job right, I am always working myself out of a job. When the vestry of St. Luke's called me to serve as rector, we were clear with each other that this would be a particular time in St. Luke's life: a time to make a difference, a time to grow, a time to change, a time for our ministry to become more and more relevant.

Of course, we could never have seen then what we see now. Much has changed and, as a good leader, I need to know when to press forward, asking you to engage in more adaptation, and when to give it a rest and have patience.

But let me encourage you to use this time we have together. Use me as a resource to bring about the common life and ministry that is already yours as children ... no that is yours as playful adults, wise children, and holy fools ... Use me as much as you desire and my time allows as a resource to bring about the common life and ministry that will make a difference in our world.

We are God's beloved people. Getting the word out that **all people** are God's beloved people is our particular and peculiar mission. If we keep to our rule of life—our principles of a healthy and holy congregation—we will flourish at the task and deepen in faith. And we will be living out our own baptisms, following the pattern and rule of Jesus.

It's nothing really new. After all, we've been talking about this stuff for over 2000 years!