

Stewardship message, September 29, 2019

“We celebrate the gift of Christian community and welcome all, without distinction, to share the joy and pain of life’s passages.” I hope this sounds familiar! It’s the first sentence of St. John’s mission. It tells who we are and who we are trying to be. I want to express my gratitude to you, to celebrate the gift represented by this community, and to encourage your support for Our Way Forward into 2020.

In late July, I was shown an image of the inside of my head, where an apricot-sized tumor pressed against my brain’s left frontal lobe. This was shocking to me. I had more questions than answers, and I was afraid of what I didn’t know. Would surgery be successful? There was a 50/50 chance that I wouldn’t be able to speak afterwards, and a 10% chance that condition would be permanent. I knew my “old normal” had ended. Confronted by the need to start living a “new normal,” I came to St. John’s the following Sunday to share my news.

When I read one of the hymns in rehearsal, I told Chad that I would not be able to lead that song that day. I sat, listened, and cried, as our other 9 o’clock musicians led us in this song.

Eternal Spirit of the Living Christ,
I know not how to ask or what to say;
I only know my need, as deep as life,
and only you can teach me how to pray.

In the weeks since, you have been the answer to that prayer. You stepped up when I asked for help to assume my volunteer commitments. You prayed for me. You shared your own experiences of hope and survival from brain disease. You followed my progress on Caring Bridge, and when I read your messages, I felt your love and support. You prayed with my family. You laid hands on me and blessed me the day before my surgery.

When I came home from the hospital, you visited me for walks, meals, and conversation. I am deeply grateful for our community’s support during my healing journey. This morning, I’m sharing joy with you, as I shared my uncertainty and fears with you before the surgery. I’ll

meet with a radiation oncologist this Wednesday, and I ask for your continued prayers, that this next phase of healing continues to go well.

A friend of mine says that people can go along for years in our individual selves or our nuclear families, often oblivious to others. Then a seismic event – a divorce, loss of a job, a death in the family, a chronic disease, a brain tumor – breaks us in half, leaving us open to sense and respond to the inpouring of the Holy Spirit. I believe that it is for those moments that faith communities exist, and that we are called to be faithful, to the strangers we will welcome and to each other — walking together in hope and love, waiting and watching for the Holy Spirit to pour through us, so that we can reach out and share that Spirit through our vocations in the wider community. It's all part of God's work to make all things new. We are Christ for one another.

This support is one of St. Johns' gifts that I want to celebrate. We as a community, help so many, without distinction. We welcome all, and we offer help without expectation of thanks. In the Jewish tradition, those who help others with no expectation of thanks are said to offer a "mitzvah," a good deed. For all we help who cannot thank us, I thank you. For all the ways you have been the face of Christ for me and for my family, I thank you.

In these troubled times, I urge you to join me joyfully and with abandon in the coming year, preparing, giving your time, talent, and treasure – for this church, for our neighbors in this city, and for the Lazaruses of this world. For all we are now, and all we are called to be, I thank God.