

Pentecost 20 (proper 23) 10-10-10 St. Luke's, EG 8 & 10 (last as rector)

How awesome are your ways, O Lord (66:2)....

in the name of the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Searching desperately for the right text to frame this homily, blessedly God led me to the psalm for the day at the crack of dawn this past Monday. The muse, that mysterious force of the Spirit, works her magic again!!

I have been dreaming about this moment for months....and they were not ALL pleasant, to say the least!

How to speak on this day when I've been so afraid I'd **turn up mute** because of the huge mix of emotions this leave-taking has wrought in us. That has been and is my challenge. (But I shouldn't have stressed so, because I seldom turn up mute!)

Then, how to keep it brief so somebody doesn't start waving this last lap flag from the choir gallery! (I stole it to make sure I had hold of it~)

There's so much to accomplish in this richly meaningful liturgy that we'll need to get on with it...well, maybe not too soon! I am so grateful to Ken Macdonald who said years ago "I don't know why people complain about the length of services; I could stay here forever!" (Ah, no wonder he's my favorite!)

Well, in fact you are ALL my favorites, for one reason or another and stories could be told about EACH of you that would indeed keep us here all day!

It strikes me today and most days the most basic truth is that "we are ALL God's favorites," and that is the truth I truly want to stress: "**How awesome are your ways, O Lord.**" Yes, indeed. (If we were Baptists, this is where you'd all respond heartily: **AMEN!** So I'll say it again 'cause I love it when you respond: "How awesome are your ways, O Lord!")

What joy for us to celebrate in so many ways God's amazing love and grace given to us just because we exist and are God's! "**You are my child, and I love YOU!**"

Do you get the message??

I asked the angel choristers last week at rehearsal as they were belting out this special song (my favorite of their repertoire) sung at the Gradual: “What do **you** think is the message?” Well, they couldn’t quite say; they hadn’t quite caught on to be able to say **“WE ARE!” For in their case, the media is the message!**

“YOU ARE GOD’S, and I love you!” What a blessing for us to take away from church every time we worship, offering ourselves as a living sacrifice, just as Christ has done for us!

“O God, how awesome are your ways. Forgive us for being dunces and not catching on quick enough. But we are here right now, after all, so I guess we have caught on just enough, and **YOU WILL DO THE REST.”**

Let us identify with that leper in today’s gospel, who came back, having realized the Lord’s blessing in his life, that he had been healed, **and so turned around and came back, shouting his gratitude, glorifying God!**

He knelt at Jesus’ feet, so grateful. He couldn’t thank him enough...and he was a Samaritan, an outsider! (Maybe he became a tither that day!)

O God, may we be like that Samaritan, that outsider, today: so grateful that we just want to shout your praise, and raise our pledges 12% so we can fulfill our mission for the coming year!

We have shed our tears over this parting, this leave-taking, we’ve anticipated for quite awhile. Somebody from a neighboring parish said last week on hearing about today’s service, “you mean he’s not gone yet!”

How humbling...it reminds me of Bill Andersen, from my last, my **FIRST** parish, St. George’s in Maplewood, so well represented here today, (where are you?) Bill was the Ken MacDonald of that parish (my favorite among all the favorites! We had so prepared for my first sabbatical back in the 80’s and he was so tired of all the extra work he said one day before I’d left: “You mean you haven’t **HAD** the sabbatical yet?”

Well, I’m a J and I like to have things line up. (You didn’t know that though.)

So, things are lined up today big-time, and I think we should get on with them. But I just have one last thing to say (among many! I'm also an E, so there's always a lot of last things to say!)

It turns out to be the first thing I ever said from this pulpit. What got us here, and then helped us to respond to the call, were what I named "the 3 P's," back on the Presentation of Christ, February 2nd, 1992:

First of all, the Place! It was beautiful and spoke to Adelene and me immediately upon entering the sanctuary. It was Sunday around 5 pm, Bruce Stevens was quietly practicing the organ up above us, exactly 19 years ago tonite. Amazing! You could sniff the prayer, & not because of incense! And today with all the windows still a treasure with their new additions in the entrance way with Josh and Fr Burns, and here in the sanctuary with the Drews and dear Bud, and the magnificent renovation, and inspiring Gardens, the Mosaic and other works of art that surround us, the PLACE is to me an outward and visible sign of God's grace.

The second P stands for the people: Bob and Joyce Petrie and his calling committee, some of whom are here today and some who have entered more fully into the nearer Presence of the Holy One. We stood around the altar for an informal Eucharist the next evening, just 12 of us, with me as the celebrant, in a moment that no one present will ever forget, for there was an unmistakable sense of the Presence of Christ in that sacrament and fellowship that converted us all, yet again, to the faith inside us, even as it still does all these years later.

The Three P's: The place, the people, and the Presence of Christ:

O God, how awesome indeed are your ways!

Continue to kindle on the altar of our hearts the love of your Name,
as we seek to respond with all our hearts and minds, bodies and souls,
to your mysterious and amazing grace in our lives,

even now, as we stand to say we believe...

