

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA
5th Sunday after Epiphany, Year B, February 4, 2018
The Rev. Bill Queen, "Setting the Tone"
Isaiah 40:21-31, Ephesians 3:20-21 (as in *The Book of Common Prayer* p. 102),
Ephesians 4:11-12

God be with you, Christ Church, remembering that church is people, not a building; what a joy and a blessing it is for us to be engaging together, as Christ's church, today at the start of a new period in the long and fruitful life of this parish: over 175 years in this building, and with a heritage going back ever further, as evidenced by the 1754 Bible of the colonial Mattaponi Old Mother Church

we are Christ's church, as his representatives here, but we, along with all other Christians, also have Christ as God's greatest gift to humankind; and if we take even a little time each day to reflect upon this gift of Christ that each of us has, and be thankful for this gift, and be mindful of how we can respond to this gift, that will give us a powerful daily reminder of how to approach each day of our lives; what did we hear Isaiah say?; "Have you not known? Have you not heard?;" he repeated it because it is so important to remember, as he goes on to describe, how God is in charge of everything, and how God gives us the power and the strength to do God's work; and that is what we are doing together: God's work

there is a prayer that sums up what Isaiah is saying; you can find it at the bottom of page 102 in the *Book of Common Prayer*; turn there please and keep it open; you might recognize it as a Bible quote, from Ephesians 3:20-21, where it is a prayer, as even the "Amen" is Paul's wording; Paul uses this prayer to summarize his view of the love of God which Christ has given us; because of this love we give, as our response (let's pray it out loud together) "Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen."

what Paul is trying to get across here and continuing into Ephesians Ch. 4, is that if we believe this prayer, we will focus our lives on using the many spiritual gifts that God has given each and every one of us for the building up of the body of Christ; Ephesians 4:11-12 says it this way: "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ"; we are the

“saints” he was talking about, and every one of us has different kinds of spiritual gifts (and the gifts he names are not an exhaustive list); so in and through us, in and through this church, in and through this community, in and throughout the world—we are called to exercise whatever spiritual gifts we have, in order to serve God’s purposes; these are very powerful marching orders, all founded upon a very powerful belief that we each take part in sharing God’s love and God’s work

I hope that by calling this prayer to mind, on this our first Lord’s Day together, it will help us set the tone and focus our ministry together for this interim time; so what does this prayer have to say to us about this interim time?; follow along with the text still on p 102

it starts “Glory to God”; that means God is the focus of our time together; not your former Rector, not your current Interim Rector, not even your future Rector; any focus other than upon God is a distraction; all that we do needs to be done with that focus on God

it says God’s power is “working in us”; that means every one of us has a job to do during this interim time; by virtue of our Baptism, we were each given the gift of the Holy Spirit, not to sit dormant within us, but to be the guiding, enlightening, strengthening motor of God’s will; that our minds, our hearts, our hands are the tools that God will use to bring about God’s greatest desires for each of us, for this church, and for this community in which we serve

it says that the power of God within us “can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine”; that doesn’t mean we don’t ask, or that we don’t imagine, but that especially during this interim time we don’t allow our limited human powers of prayer and imagination to place any restrictions upon what God can accomplish in us, through us, and about us; we are supposed to ask big; we are supposed to dream big; we are supposed to expect big—from God

it says God is given glory “from generation to generation”; that means this interim time is to help us start with this parish’s history, as that is the foundation upon which we will continue building; but but then to move on with the challenge of making sure that this faith is getting actively passed on to the next generations of younger adults, teenagers, and children who are coming along after us

it says God is given glory “in the Church”; that does not necessarily mean only within the walls of this church building, or the parish hall, or the parish offices, or

the Thrift Shop; again, church is people, not buildings, and this interim time presents an invitation to rethink how we invite and extend participation to ever larger definitions of community; and that includes any person or group of people who do not currently have a relationship with God, with Christ, and with the Holy Spirit

it says “in Christ Jesus”; that means God is not remote or far away from us; God is with us through Christ, who knows us intimately; Christ has been present with this parish for its entire history, and will be continue being present with us; this interim time presents a window of opportunity to look for Christ’s presence in new activities, in new places, and in new faces

it says “for ever and ever”; that means all that we do now has lasting eternal consequences, far beyond this interim time, for us and for the people around us whose lives we touch; all we do together is such important work

and finally it says “Amen,” reminding us that our approach to everything we do in this interim time, as individuals, as groups, and as an entire parish, must be based on prayer; we are to remember to pray before, during, and after every activity, because only in such a mindset and heartset of prayerfulness can we give ourselves over fully to God’s purposes and allow the Holy Spirit to work fully through us

I hope you will take the time to use this Bible and prayer book prayer in your devotional lives and in our church activities; I hope that you may come to find it as meaningful and as inspirational as I do; and I hope you will live with it in your thoughts and prayers and allow it to set the tone for all that we will be doing together in this interim time ahead