

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA
Proper 26, Year B, All Saints' Sunday, November 4, 2018
The Rev. Bill Queen, "We Present Our Selves to God"

I want to share two show-and-tell items with you this morning; first, an offering plate; you see these often, and thank you for always making generous use of them; remember that we always stand as the offering plates are brought forward? I want to point out that standing then is not just a custom, nor do we stand just because we are saying or singing the Doxology at that point in the service

the special significance in standing for the presentation of the offerings is that by it we show that we all participate in the act of giving, and to recognize that all of our gifts have been gathered together and presented together; it is more than just a collection of individual gifts; it is one gift given by this church community; it is a reminder that we are all in this together—in the giving and in the ministries that flow from this giving

and today we have a special kind of giving to be recognized, as I have all of the pledge cards which have been turned in so far already placed on the altar; some pledge cards have already been carried forward in the offering plates, or been delivered by mail, or been dropped off at the office in person; and more may come up in the offering plates today; this special offering is one combined gift from all of you that is meant to sustain God's ministries carried out through this church community for the future, for the entire year to come; but remember that any future years to come after that will build upon 2019, and especially since 2019 will be the first year of your new Rector's tenure with you

you sustain God's ministries on into the continuing future by your financial contributions, noted on the front side of the pledge card, and you sustain God's ministries on into the continuing future by your volunteer commitments, noted on the back side of the pledge card; and we will be recognizing both kinds of your commitments with a special blessing of your gifts at the altar today

today we are also looking backwards a bit, recalling our baptisms and recommitting ourselves to a life of faith by renewing our baptismal vows; that reminds us to keep all of those promises active and up-to-date in our present lives of faith; and we look back to the past also in thanksgiving as we remember the saints who have come before us, and will remember them by name within our Eucharistic Prayer; this is a special day indeed as we recognize the importance of past, present, and future, and how those are always working together upon us

the other show-and-tell item I have today is a paper weight; it is a molded plaster disc; it has a splattering of green and blue paint on it, which may have been intended to represent something that I cannot recognize; perhaps those were my son Philip's favorite colors; I know it was Philip who made this because of his name and date on it; the date tells me Philip was a month shy of being two years old when he made this; it has been sitting on my desk for over 20 years

I have never in my entire life needed a paperweight; its shape is too small and uneven to serve as a coaster; but what it does serve as, for me, is a physical reminder of that cute little boy at that age; of how he has changed and grown over the years; of just how proud I am to be his father and of all the memories and the connections we have formed as father and son over the years; the coaster is a representation of love; and I can recall receiving so many other gifts like it that were made at other schools, in other years, by all three of our children; each one presented with a tremendous sense of pride from having made something, and from a desire to give it as a gift of love; a child's gift such as this, no matter how small, is really a gift of himself or of herself

and that's what connects these things together, the offering plate and the paperweight; you have all participated in this act of giving together to something special that will extend a long legacy of ministry in this place onward into the future; and what you have given has been given out of great love—love of God, love of God's people, and love of God's plans for this church and for this community

what you have given to the church is a lot more than a pledge card and the money and time commitments it represents; you have given from all of the time and skill and energy it took you to earn that money and earn that free time; you have given from your desire to see God's kingdom spread through

the ministries of this church community; you have given of nothing less than your selves

you hear me use this offertory sentence every Sunday, from Romans 12:1: "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present yourselves as a living sacrifice;" that's what you've been doing; now I want you to picture this: when the offering plates are brought up and placed on the altar every week, and especially today when we have a year's worth of your love and hopes and dreams for God's work in this parish represented by your pledge cards also placed upon the altar, picture that you have placed yourselves upon the altar; these gifts are more than just a representation or a symbol of you; they are you; they are your sacramental offering of yourselves to God; and like everything we place upon the altar, we give our gifts to God in order that God may give them back to us, blessed; think for a minute about how your involvement with God here through Christ Church continues to bless you (pause)

on behalf of the Vestry and of this entire parish community, thanks to each of you for what you have given of yourselves in the past; thank you for what you are giving of yourselves now in the present; and thank you for what you have pledged to give of yourselves in the future; may we all be especially attentive today to how we continue to offer ourselves to God; and may we all be especially thankful for the ways that God is blessing each and every one of us