

**8 Pentecost  
July 31, 2022**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.  
Amen.**

So, the reading from Luke's gospel this morning is about a man ... a farmer ... whose land has produced abundantly ... so abundantly that he has no room to store all his grain. Rather than sell or give the excess grain away to others, the man decides to tear down his storage units, and build bigger ones. This man figured that he would be set for life, and that he could "relax, eat, drink and be merry." What he didn't figure on was his death before the grain could be put into storage. The story ends with the line: "<sup>21</sup>So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

I usually read over the lessons for the coming Sunday on Monday morning, and then ponder them all week before putting my thoughts down in writing. You heard me say it a million times, it is not about whether it was true then, but, rather, how do I know this story to be true in my life today. So, I ponder, and I look for connections in the life of the people around me, and in the news.

This is a news piece that ran in the Washington Post last week:

*NEW YORK (AP) — A preacher known for his close friendship with New York City's mayor was robbed of more than \$1 million worth of jewelry Sunday by armed bandits who crashed his Brooklyn church service, just as he was sermonizing about keeping faith in the face of grave adversity, police said.*

*Bishop Lamor Miller-Whitehead, who embraces his flashy lifestyle and can often be seen driving around the Big Apple in his Rolls Royce, was delivering a sermon at his Leaders of Tomorrow International Ministries when police say three robbers walked in. They showed guns and demanded property from Miller-Whitehead and his wife, Asia K. DosReis-Whitehead, police said.*

*"It's not about me being flashy," Miller-Whitehead said. "It's about me, purchasing what I want to purchase. And it's my prerogative to purchase what I want to purchase."*

I wondered if he is going to preach on this lesson from Luke this Sunday. For the time being, that is all I have to say about this reading from Luke's gospel.

The sermon that I am going to preach isn't your typical sermon ... at least not from me. St. Cyprian's is in a transitional phase of its life, and Caren and I are in a transitional phase of our

lives. So, I thought I'd tell you a little about my personal life at this moment in time, and say a few things about St. Cyprian's life now and in the near future.

Caren and I have sold our house on Washington Street ... just a couple of blocks from here. We are buying a house in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Later this week the movers will come to load up our household possessions and drive them to Albuquerque to be delivered sometime the following week.

Caren and I will drive to Albuquerque in our small motorhome ... with our two dogs ... and will be gone from St. Cyprian's for the next two Sundays. Deacon Steve Seibert and Fr. Mal Jopling will serve while I am gone. When Caren and I return to St. Augustine late in the week of August 15, we will live in our motorhome and/or in space made available to us from parishioners and friends. We will then be present on Sunday August 21 until our last Sunday on September 25.

This is an anxious time for me ... for me and Caren ... and I imagine for you as well. Caren and I are trying to pack everything into boxes, arrange the closings on two homes, plan our travels, and transitioning our responsibilities ... me, here at St. Cyprian's, and Caren with Compassionate St. Augustine.

Of course, in the midst of all this Murphy's Law is always in play ... If something can go wrong, it will ... and at the worst possible time. You can tell that by the way the worship booklet was put together ... which is my fault for giving the generous volunteers the wrong information.

You see, a week ago today, Holly Horahan's husband, Anthony, tested positive for COVID, and Holly's daughter, Evie, started running a fever and vomiting. Holly ... for those that don't know ... is St. Cyprian's Office Administrator and she runs everything in the church. By the end of the week, Holly was still testing negative, but had horrible head congestion, aches and pains, and fatigue.

So, during what I thought was going to be a week where I could focus on packing, things changed quickly. I had folks who jumped in to help, but my anxiety level began to rise. That is when I recognized the line in our first reading from Ecclesiastes,

*"For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity."*

Ah, those panic attacks at 3 in the morning that keep me from getting back to sleep ... "even at night their minds do not rest."

Now, I know that one way or another, things will work out ... they always do. However, knowing that I am anxious ... acknowledging that anxiety ... is the first step in overcoming its effects in my life. That is true for all of us. And, to be honest, there is reason to feel anxious. Anxiety always accompanies change. If one is prepared for that anxiety, it can actually be an

asset that helps us focus on priorities. If one is not prepared for anxiety, it can be the cause of some very unhealthy behaviors ... individually ... and as a community.

Let's take a look at that first lesson this morning from the apocryphal book of Ecclesiastes. The Teacher ... the one who is narrating this story ... is reflecting upon his own life and its value, if any. He has "toiled" his whole life ... and for what? So that someone can come after him, enjoy the benefits of the Teacher's toil, but do nothing to extend those benefits? But worrying about what might happen after he is gone is really just an ego trip ... it is vanity, all vanity.

*"<sup>22</sup>What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun?  
<sup>23</sup>For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity."*

Ouch! How did the Teacher know that to be true ... then for him, and now for me? At that time it was true for the Teacher, and now it is true for me ... and people like me.

Anxiety and ego. Transitions and the effects it has on all of us. What can we do, and how do we do it? Those questions ... "What can we do?" and "How do we do it?" are key to getting beyond the anxiety and the role of ego in that anxiety. And here I am preaching to myself as well as to you ... the beautiful people of St. Cyprian's.

As I have said before, I am overwhelmingly grateful to you ... the people of St. Cyprian's ... for the opportunity to do ministry in this corner of God's vineyard in the way that I have always desired to do ministry. Your support ... your enthusiasm for including everyone who crosses our threshold ... your care for those who are in need, and hungry, and voiceless, and disenfranchised ... your financial support of our vision of God's expression ... all your support has been amazing. St. Cyprian's is not about me ... it is about God's sacred Spirit so alive in this community that we all worked together for the common good of the Creation around us.

When the Teacher speaks of his "toil" and all the accomplishments as "vanity" I certainly understand ... but it also keeps me accountable. This is not about me ... it is about us and our openness to God's Spirit to lead all of us together. That will not end just because I am retiring.

Here is an outline of what is ahead for the people of St. Cyprian's. Some of this is redundant ... a repeat of what I have already said at other times ... yet I hope this description can help address any anxiety you personally may have ... and that it will help address the anxiety in the whole St. Cyprian's emotional system.

First, the Mission Board has met by Zoom with Bishop John Howard and Canon to the Ordinary Allison DeFoor, and the Mission Board had a separate meeting in which Canon DeFoor came in person to join us for our regularly scheduled July Mission Board meeting. Both Bishop Howard and Canon DeFoor assured us many times, and in different ways, that they are not interested in changing the "culture" of St. Cyprian's.

Secondly, Bishop Howard gave the Mission Board the authority of act as the Search Committee for St. Cyprian's next Vicar. The Bishop has the complete authority to appoint anyone he chooses as Vicar, yet he took that off the table, and wants this to be a "collaborative" process.

Thirdly, Bishop Howard appointed Steve Seibert to serve with us at St. Cyprian's as a Deacon. This is a major piece of the bigger picture. When I accepted the appointment by Bishop Howard as Vicar back in 2008 it was to be part time for two or three years. As the congregation grew so did the pastoral needs among other things. I ... and we ... were blessed by having Pastor Deena Galantowicz as our Pastoral Associate until her retirement last year. Deacon Steve will be assuming many of those duties ... a ministry for which he is well qualified.

Deacon Steve will also be a "liaison" to the priests who will be celebrating at the altar once I have retired. We are blessed to have Steve ... and Leila ... as part of the St. Cyprian's community.

How will this search process work? What role does the congregation play in this endeavor?

Joe Finnegan, as Senior Warden, is already setting the groundwork for the search process in communication with Canon DeFoor. This will allow the Mission Board/Search Committee to hit the ground running in early October. Canon DeFoor will celebrate and preach on the first Sunday in October to reiterate the collaborative commitment the Bishop has made, and to encourage the congregation to fully participate.

The Mission Board/Search Committee will then use a template available throughout the Episcopal Church to seek input for a Parish Profile which will describe St. Cyprian's to prospective candidates. More than likely this will involve revisiting St. Cyprian's Core Values, Mission, and Vision Statements and expounding upon their meanings and making revision where necessary. There will be general meetings, individual surveys, and interviews with key leaders in the congregation. Everyone will have the opportunity to express their opinion. No one will have the authority to veto what another has to say.

Once the Parish Profile is completed, it will be distributed through various means to potential candidates. If a member of the congregation knows of an Episcopal priest that they believe would be interested in the position of part-time Vicar they will have the opportunity to nominate them as a candidate to the Mission Board/Search Committee. Other candidates will submit their names directly for consideration, and Canon DeFoor will also provide the names of interested candidates.

As candidates send in their resumes, the Mission Board/Search Committee will do triage ... separating the candidates into three groups ... A, B, and C candidates. More than likely, the Mission Board/Search Committee will then ask a smaller group of candidates to write responses to specific questions regarding their ministry and how they see it fitting in with the ministry of this congregation. Along the way, the Mission Board/Search Committee will be in discussion

with Canon DeFoor, and as the list of potential candidates gets even smaller, there will be interviews with candidates until there is a short list to recommend to Bishop Howard.

This whole process will take time. Most of the Parish Profile process will be highly transparent. However, once the list of potential candidates begins to form there will have to be a degree of confidentiality within the Mission Board/Search committee regarding particular names. At this point, the congregation's participation is going to have to be one of trust, patience, and prayer.

This roadmap of the process is offered from my own experience, both as a candidate for a number of different positions during my career, and as a consultant to other congregations going through this process.

St. Cyprian's process will be St. Cyprian's process, so there may be some tweaks here and there, so please see this as a very general description. However, I offer it to you to reassure you that although this transition may engender anxiety at times, I trust that God's sacred Spirit will direct you to an exciting future.

After my retirement St. Cyprian's will be served by Deacon Steve, and visiting priests. St. Cyprian's Senior Warden, Joe Finnegan, has already arranged for visiting priests through the end of 2022. On October 2, the first Sunday after my retirement, Canon DeFoor will preach and celebrate. For the next four Sundays Fr. Michael Moore will serve at the altar, and during the months of November and December, Fr. Mal Jopling will be the celebrant.

I began this sermon with the story of the farmer who wanted to "relax, eat, drink and be merry," and then he died before any of that could happen. The story ends with the moral: "21So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

You, the people of St. Cyprian's obviously know this well ... you do not need this story ... you have been generous in many, many ways.

The Teacher in our reading from Ecclesiastes points to the relationship between ego and anxiety. This transition ... my retirement after 14 years as your Vicar ... and your search for a new priest to lead you in the future ... is full of the potential for anxiety. However, with God's help ... with the power of God's sacred Spirit at work in this congregation ... St. Cyprian's will weather this time and be stronger for it.

Trust in God ... trust those in leadership here at St. Cyprian's ... and be patient.

Amen.