

**16 Pentecost
September 25, 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.**

Today is a celebration. Yes, after almost fifty years of ministry, and fourteen years here at St. Cyprian's, I am retiring. But this is about much more than just my retirement, is a celebration of what we have done together ... with God's help ... in this corner of God's vineyard. It is a celebration of what we have done ... what we are doing ... and what God's divine Spirit is leading this community to do in the future.

I mentioned last week that I began my seminary studies fifty years ago this month. Going to seminary ... I think ... is a lot like going to culinary school. You learn the basic science of cooking ... salt, fat, acid, etc.. You acquire some skills to use in the kitchen ... how to chop food and not your finger. And by the end of your education you can prepare a gourmet meal.

However, what I discovered is that pastoring a congregation, on the other hand, is like waking up every morning to an episode of Chopped. The ingredients are completely random ... you are expected to do something with whatever is handed to you ... and the whole time everyone is watching you, giving you a running commentary, and occasionally something explodes and it is all rather messy.

Yet, with the right spices ... like God's Spirit ... it turns into a feast. Let me give you an example.

This young lady just had another birthday, and at her age another birthday is something to celebrate. Now, many of you have heard this story before, but I'd like to put a different twist on it this morning. Dr. Dorothy Israel has been a member of this congregation for at least three decades. She has served on the Mission Board, led committees, assisted at the altar, and been a guiding force in this community since well before I arrived on the scene.

In 2006, her pastor and good friend ... Fr. David Allert ... stood in that pulpit and told the congregation that they were going to leave the Episcopal Church.

After Fr. Allert had had his say, Dr. Israel stood up and said she wanted to speak ... speak her truth about why she thought that leaving the Episcopal Church was a bad idea, and she gave all her reasons about why the congregation should remain part of the larger Episcopal Church.

At that point someone suggested that those who agreed with Fr. Allert stand on one side of the church, and those who agreed with Dr. Israel stand on the other. Dr. Israel had only a handful of people standing with her, while scores of people stood with Fr. Allert.

Now, can you imagine the courage it took for this woman to stand and face her pastor and friend, and tell him honestly that she believed he was wrong? Dr. Israel wasn't to be intimidated ... she stood by her convictions ... even in the face of the existential death that threatened her and her community of faith.

Now, let me shift gears here, and tell you about another member of our congregation, Tommy Cash. In 2003 Tommy lived in New Hampshire. The Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire was electing a new bishop co-adjutor ... much like the Diocese of Florida is attempting to do. Tommy was one of the Delegates to the Convention, and one of the candidates was a priest who was well-liked by the people of the Diocese of New Hampshire, the Rev. Gene Robinson. It was also well-known in the Diocese that Gene Robinson was a gay man in a long-term relationship with his partner. Tommy Cash cast his vote for Gene Robinson to be Bishop of the Diocese of New Hampshire.

Gene Robinson's election to be bishop caused a huge uproar in the greater Episcopal Church, and was the primary reason the Fr. David Allert felt justified in leading the congregation of St. Cyprian's away from the Episcopal Church.

So, if I've got this right ... Tommy Cash voted for Gene Robinson. Fr. David Allert stood in that pulpit and said that the people of St. Cyprian's should leave the Episcopal Church. Dr. Dorothy Israel stood up and said why the people should stay. It's all Tommy's fault! We can blame Tommy for the schism at St. Cyprian's ... and all the angst that it caused Dr. Israel.

Sure, it would be easy to make those connections except for one piece that I left out ... God's divine ... sacred ... holy Spirit. First of all, what are the odds that Tommy Cash, who voted for Gene Robinson, would find a church home here at St. Cyprian's ... over 1,200 miles away ... after a schism over the actions that Tommy ... and others ... took in 2003? Does God's divine Spirit offer an answer? Does being a resurrection community have anything to do with that?

We are a resurrection community. We celebrate that every week with our Holy Eucharist. But resurrection from the dead begins with death, and death is painful.

St. Cyprian's today could not exist had it not died on that Sunday in 2006 when Fr. Allert led the congregation out the door. For that handful of parishioners gathered around Dr. Israel that day it was a painful death, with grief and sadness permeating every thought they had.

But God's divine Spirit was not going to let that be the final word. Pastor Deena Galantowicz stepped in to put the pieces back together ... to comfort those broken by the schism ... bringing healing to those in pain. She held the small group together and gave them hope ... hope for a new life after this death ... hope in resurrection.

This congregation today is built upon Tommy's vote in 2003, Dr. Israel's courage in 2006, and Pastor Deena's faithful ministry in this place. And it was into this community that God's divine

Spirit led me in 2007. I wasn't looking for another church to lead ... I was grieving the death of my mother. Yet, God has a way of turning all this upside down.

So, today is a celebration of what we together have done ... what we are doing ... and what is still left to do in this corner of God's vineyard ... all with God's help. This is a celebration of St. Cyprian's as a resurrection community.

Yes, I had a role ... Caren and I had a role ... in leading us in the direction we together chose. We have all been blessed. I have been blessed by you, just as you have been blessed by each other, and by God. I'll be honest, after all these years I'm still not sure that I know what God is, but I see God every day in the lives of all of you.

You invited me into your lives at some of the most intimate moments of your spiritual journey. We have laughed together, cried together, comforted each other, and shared whatever gifts God has given us individually with each other for the good of the community. This is what this faith community of St. Cyprian's is about, and I will be forever grateful for the opportunity to have been a part of your journey.

Many of you have expressed your gratitude to me for the blessings you have felt as part of St. Cyprian's. I feel the same way. You have blessed my life, and I am forever grateful for the opportunity to have been able to serve you with God's help.

Today we also celebrate the completion of the renovation of St. Cyprian's Mission House. The Mission House was originally built in 1918 after the death of the Rev. Peter Williams Cassey, St. Cyprian's first Vicar. At that time it was used as the Rectory for the clergy serving the congregation. Believe it or not, what is now our Mission House cost \$3,700 to build over a century ago.

When St. Cyprian's no longer could afford fulltime clergy, the Rectory was used for meetings and classes. Along the way some walls were removed to open the space. This renovation we just completed removed more walls, and moved the kitchen to make it a more efficient and attractive space. As you will see, it is perfect for our post-Vespers wine & cheese gatherings, community groups meetings, and receptions of all kinds.

But getting there was the work of many people in this congregation. The first conversation about renovating the Mission House was over a decade ago. But first we built the Commons, with the outdoor chapel dedicated to Dr. Israel, and a Prayer Wall for people of all faiths to have access to a holy and peaceful spot for meditation and reflection.

Building the Commons, and then Beyond the Commons has been the work of this community of faith. Through your generosity both capital fundraising campaigns far exceeded our expectations. Yes, the pandemic slowed us down, but we are now there.

Life in this congregation is multi-faceted, and the Commons and the renovation of the Mission House are just one part of our life together. But it is an example of how this community's generous spirit just overflows. It is an example of the power of a resurrected life.

I would like to close with a reflection on a prayer in the Book of Common Prayer's Marriage service. I think it speaks to more than just the relationship between a married couple ... it also speaks to a relationship such as we have lived for the past fourteen years.

Give them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a strength in need, and counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy.

I leave you with my blessings. For any disappointments along the way, I ask for your forgiveness. For the joys we have celebrated together I praise God. For the comfort given one another I see God's divine Spirit alive in each of your faces. And I give thanks for your counsel in times of perplexity, and for your strength shown in so many ways.

St. Cyprian's a resurrection community ... not just in the faith we proclaim in words, but by the faith we live every day. Sure, there are days when the feast we are preparing of random offerings explodes into a mess. But this is a celebration of our life together ... you, me, and God's divine Spirit. It is about what we have done, what we are doing, and what will be done in the future.

As Dag Hammarskjöld said:

For all that has been. THANKS! For all that will be. YES.

Amen.