



SAINT JAMES'
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Fremont, California

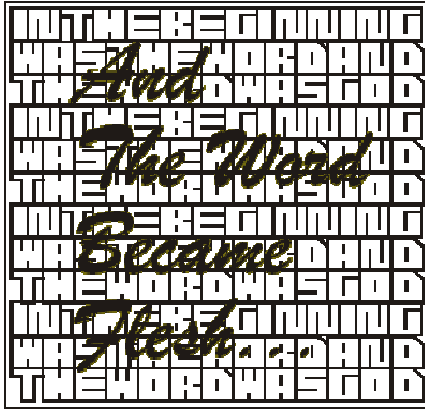
SERMON

27. December, 2009. Christmas I

Title: "God Lives Among You!"

Text: John 1:1-18

J.J.



"Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow" . . . so Juliet says to Romeo in that incredible Shakespearian tragedy. And I suppose, in some ways, we could all join in with Juliet's sentiments as we come to this day. Saying goodbye to those you love, whether it's from a balcony, or leaving someone off at the airport, or moving to a new location, or ending a relationship, or resigning your call as interim priest from a church you dearly love . . . saying goodbye is never easy. Indeed, "Parting is such sweet sorrow." And, for that reason, we have taken the time we need today to say our goodbyes to one another . . . with only one service so that we all have the opportunity to bid our fond farewells . . . and a special potluck lunch after this service so we can "celebrate" the day (food always seems to help us Episcopalians through such occasions). Notice, I said: "to celebrate this

day" and not just "to observe" it. Today is a day of celebration, and, the focus of this day is not just on me . . . no, the focus is on us . . . on all of us . . . as today's Collect so well points out: "Almighty God, you have poured upon **us** the new light of your incarnate Word: Grant that this light, enkindled in **our** hearts, may shine forth in **our** lives; through Jesus Christ **our** Lord . . ." or as today's Gospel from St. John reminds us, —a text that is one of my favorite chapters in all of Scripture—"the Word became flesh and lived among **us**, and **we** have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." And so, as I take leave from St. James', I invite **us all** to hear these words carefully, as **our** life journeys continue, but now, down different paths: "The Word became flesh . . . and lived among **us**." Indeed! ***God Lives Among Us!***

We have had an incredible fourteen plus months together . . . at least I have, and I hope the same is true for you. As I said to +Bishop Marc in my meeting with him last Tuesday, in my forty-four years as an ordained priest, I have not had a more positive or fulfilling ministry. I shall never forget St. James', Fremont. But let's take a look at what we, together, have accomplished in these fourteen plus months.

When I first interviewed with the Vestry for the position of interim priest, I indicated that we would have five tasks to accomplish . . . well, five tasks that we should at least get a good start at. I wrote about those tasks several times in my "Breathing Room—Intentional Interim Ministry" articles for *The Window*, as well in my monthly ViewPoint's; and, as I look back over those 14 months, I want you to know that I think—and, by the way, so does +Bishop Marc—you and Kathy+ and I have done quite well in trying to carry out those tasks, that is: (1) coming to terms with our history, (2) examining our leadership and organizational needs, (3) renewing our relationships with the Diocese, as well as neighboring parishes, (4) developing a new identity and owning our own vision of the ministry here in this place, and (5) committing ourselves to and preparing ourselves for new pastoral leadership. These are not easy tasks, but, we've made a good start—yes, I said a good start. By the way, these goals are not just for interim time . . . they are on-going tasks . . . now he tells us . . . but we've made a good start!

Now, letting go of the past and coming to terms with our own history is never a simple process. Over the months, however, as we told and retold our stories, and as we celebrated and re-celebrated our past—I will not forget our St. James' Day celebration last July with the Independent Philippine Church . . . it was great! . . . and by the way, Fr. Aurelio says the same thing—as we shared our journeys together here at St. James', we were able to let go and to bring closure to some of those past issues which slowed our progress and hindered our ministry . . . in other words, we have and are continuing to prepare ourselves for what God has in mind for us here at St. James' . . . and we have and are doing a good job of it. Is that task over? Far from it (not sure one ever gets done with that task—it's on-going). But we have made a good beginning.

And the same is true for examining our leadership and organizational needs. During these fourteen+ months, we have made some necessary and important changes . . . and Kathy+ and I know that change is never easy. Our Vestry Committees, for example, are taking a more active leadership role in the Parish; various groups are learning to work with and through the appropriate Vestry Committees (yes, we have a ways to go, but we are making progress); we have come to a mutual agreement about doing Rite I at the 8am service on the fifth Sunday of the month (and I must say, that was an interesting challenge for me who never had done Rite I before—thanks for your patience), and during the summer we experimented with going to two services on a Sunday morning, and we mutually agreed upon continuing this schedule at least for the for-seeable future . In other words, we are listening to one another and learning to work together in better ways to carry out the ministry to which God has, and is, calling us.

As a Parish in the Episcopal Diocese of California, we are also working hard to develop and to renew our relationships with our Bishop and with the staff of the Diocese . . . with our Deanery . . . with Area Ministry . . . with neighboring Parishes, as well as the many organizations that make up the Fremont area, and we are doing a good job of building and strengthening those relationships (Kathy+ and I will never forget the day we walked into the Abode Open House, a little late, and the Executive Director stopped everything to welcome us as one of the founding congregations . . . boy we were embarrassed). Yes, we are reaching out!

And, we as a congregation . . . we are making good progress in developing a new identity and owning our vision. We did a good job of that in the writing of our “Parish Profile,” and I don’t just mean the Transition Team (our hats are off to them for their excellent work), but we all had a hand in putting that together through meetings, and questionnaires and conversations. A lot of time was given by all of us. Well done! (A little “hebris”—“pride” doesn’t hurt anyone). As time goes by, the “Prayer for St. James” will not just be an artfully framed picture that hangs on our walls, but will be the prayer that is in our hearts: “Most Holy God, source of our vision, guide us to embrace the potential of this community to serve you in new and loving ways. Direct us in our efforts as we work together with love for our neighbors. Help us to welcome and accept all people. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.” And let me tell you, we have modeled that prayer for this Diocese as we thought “out-of-the-box,” calling CO-interim clergy (rarely, if ever done before), and as we created BOTH a Transition Team AND a Search Committee for the calling of our new Rector (again, rarely, if ever, done before in any Diocese). Way to go, St. James’! (and by the way, that was recognized and supported by the Bishop in my conversation with him last Tuesday).

And, we are getting ourselves ready and committing ourselves to the calling new Pastoral Leadership, a clergy person who will work *with us* to discern *our* vision, clarify *our* mission, and to set the kind of goals which will enable *us, all*, to carry out the work that God is calling *us* to do.

How do we continue to accomplish these tasks? Well, today’s Gospel says it loud and clear: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And (that) Word became flesh and lived among us . . . (and) we have seen his glory . . . full of grace and truth . . . (and) from his fullness, **we have all** received, grace upon grace” to carry out the ministry entrusted to us!! . . . No . . . correction . . . grace upon grace to carry out the ministry that has been entrusted **to you** . . . entrusted **to you!!** I now take my leave . . . but God is with **you** . . . The Word made flesh . . . God is with **you** . . . full of grace and truth . . . God is with **you**. And, you have seen God’s grace and truth . . . for that grace and that truth is with **you** . . . and that grace and truth will enable **you**, here at St. James’ . . . that grace and truth will enable **you** to continue to carry out the ministry to which God has called **you**. “God Lives Among **You!**” Amen.

S.D.G.

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