

St. Thomas's Episcopal Church
Newark, DE
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost and 175th Anniversary of St. Thomas's Parish
September 24, 2017 Year A
1 Kings 8:22-39; Psalm 84:1-6; 1 Peter 2:1-5, 9-10; Matthew 21:12-16
The Reverend Paul W. Gennett, Jr.

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May my words reveal the greater glory of God.

AMEN

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HAPPY ANNIVERSARY ST. THOMAS'S!!! We celebrate 175 years young this year! You do not look a day over ... I will take M. C. Hammer's advice here and **"don't touch this!"** There are many **touchstones** of this day that are important to know, to remember, so that we may **live them forward.**

First, my deepest thanks to the 175th Anniversary Leader Team who have organized these events during 2017 – **Tom Fairchild, Laura Greene, and Nicole Cebula in programs, and Connie Cooper in historical gleaning and gathering.** I know there are many other hands and hearts that our leader team called upon to share in service. To all I give my thanks and that of your parish family.

During the Wednesday bible study gathering, some found the lectionary selections for the **Anniversary of a Church** to be rather ... well let me use the word **different.** Now to be transparent, they are not pulled from my broad, deep, and highly creative use of scriptural selections. You can find this lectionary array on page 929 of The Book of Common Prayer – there is a lot of great things in our Prayer Book! As I read again the history of the parish from the information gathered by Connie and others, I found a consistent thread of God's presence and promise upon this place in our 175 years, and the thread that binds us then and now and onward is purely and simply **people!**

The people of God at St. Thomas's parish then ... the people of God at St. Thomas's now ... the people of God you and I are this day forward, LIVING stones of God's Love.

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"Come to God, a living stone ... precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood ... acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

The post-resurrection writers of the letters we read in the New Testament frequently use the image and metaphor of **a building and temple** yet in new ways the missional church had come to be. While the Temple of Jerusalem still stood in these early years, only to be destroyed for the second and final time by Rome in the late 60's, their focus pointed again and again to the people of God and Christ as the LIVING building stones of faith. I was struck by this again in Daily Office reading this week from 1 Corinthians 3 ...

For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe ... I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth ... The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose ... For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building."

YOU are God's building! St. Thomas's, 175 years young this year, continues NOT because of the edifices in which we have and now worship. St. Thomas's continues NOT because of our outstanding ministry to the University of Delaware all these years. St. Thomas's continues NOT because of our Episcopal "aren't we special" presence alone. St. Thomas's was and is and will continue to be through being **the living stones** of Love that we proclaim as our calling in our mission statement – **"We ARE God's Love to our community, the University of Delaware, and to the world."**

So what do 175 year young **living stones** look like this day? They look like ALL the people who gather around this table to be fed with spiritual food and to feed one another as God's loving communion of saints now. Food and hygiene items that will feed and care for the least, the lost, and the last of our community. They look like the neighbors in our community, seeking to live at peace and to be the peace that passes all understanding, and they just need to see in the **living stones** of your faith what this looks and lives like!

They look like EACH OF YOU who will be commissioned in the ministries in which you serve this place and this people. And if you are not standing, LOOK AROUND and find someone to talk about their ministry and how you may share your gifts and talents. The **living stones** of St. Thomas's are you and me, now and onward. THAT is how it works!

These are not the words that brought our bible sojourners to pause this Wednesday past, but it was *"Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander ... so that by it you may grow into salvation **if indeed you have tasted [chosen] that the Lord is good.**"* The choices of living and navigating our life of faith IN the world are no different today than in Peter's missional community. The number and access to these choices has grown exponentially. But they are still OUR choice none the less.

I have journeyed with the image of our mutual transition at the end of October as **Chapter 22, Page 175 – Forward in Faith**. The image is that the next clergy person you invite to share in this ministry will be the 22nd rector TO St. Thomas's. I emphasize TO St. Thomas's as I have these nine years I have served with you. It WILL NOT and CANNOT be calling the next person to SAVE YOU but to SERVE WITH YOU.

THIS is what **LIVING stones of God's Love** really look like. All you have to do, right now, is **look to your right ... look to your left ... look in these living mirrors of God's *imago dei* present in each and every one of you!**

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As our glorious array of the Pilgrimage Windows call to us on this day, 175 years young ...

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith ...”

AMEN