

b19Pentecost 15 ~ September 13, 2009 ~ A homily preached by The Rev'd
Erl G. Purnell at *Old St. Andrew's Church*, Bloomfield, CT

Proverbs 1.20-33; Psalm 19; James 3.1-12; Mark 8.27-38

Eight years ago this Sunday, we sat stunned at the devastation in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington. Few among us had adjusted to the emotional wounds of our nation and the sadness toward those so cruelly killed in the attacks of 911. The storms of that stunningly beautiful fall day continue to roil in the gut and psyche of America. We cannot and we should not forget.

Let us pray. (moment of silence)

*Gracious God,
Gracious Creator of the universe
and this fragile earth our island home,
Gracious Lover of humankind and all living things,
we pray with you today
from the marrow of our bones
and through the blood of our veins:*

*O God, we pray for goodness, not evil;
for justice, not hate;
for peace, not war;
for love, not fear.*

*O God, we pray for those killed and hurt
on September 11, 2001;
for this nation in its grief
and for all nations;
for peoples of all faiths and no faith;
for people of all races;
for people of hope.*

*Strengthen and gentle our hearts
and bring us the spirit of Jesus. Amen.*

In the ebb and flow of our own lives, today we also face change. For many, maybe even most, change is never easy. I'm sure you were buffeted by surprise when you learned this week that Yves had accepted a position as organist and choir director at another church. This was unexpected.

For over twenty-five years, Yves has been a fixture at OSA, this small, family church in north Bloomfield. We have been lucky. He has flooded these

spaces with beautiful organ and piano music; he has directed the choir whose voices have, likewise, graced our worship; he composed both short and long original pieces of music to the greater glory of God and for our pleasure; and he brought talented musicians here to augment the joy of the organ and our choristers.

We are fortunate that Yves gave us so much for so long. When he and I first spoke after I learned of his decision, he told me his wife, Paula, recently remarked, "Yves, I'm surprised you didn't take another church job long ago to further your career."

From what I understand, the United Methodist Church in Simsbury sought out Yves over the summer. Although he and I were discussing an updated *Letter of Agreement*, the position at the Methodist Church provides Yves with a tremendous opportunity to grow at a large, program-sized church. He has taken a big step forward professionally and we need to appreciate and honor this next stage in his career.

At the same time, I have already heard questions about how could we let this happen; how can we replace Yves; what will we do moving forward?

Although Yves and I didn't always see eye-to-eye, I respected him and his skills very much. I looked forward to a year when Yves, in collaboration with Liz Miller, our new singers and me, would offer some innovations to our music program with selections from LEVAS, more classical pieces, and some church-appropriate current music. Did these expectations affect Yves' decision? I really don't know.

Yes, Yves' place on the organ bench will be hard to fill. Yet, none of us is indispensable. Neither Yves, nor Karen, nor Liz, nor me. This parish has seen parishioners, organists and rectors come and go for 269 years. The way things were ... is not how they are now. And next year, we'll be different from who we are today.

While we cannot replace Yves, we will find new leadership for our music program. To that end and with Vestry support, I have asked choir members Diane Fisher and Sue O'Clair to join with Liz and me as a Music Committee. Liz will continue to serve as Music Coordinator but with greater responsibilities for overseeing the details of our music activities, such as planning service music week-by-week and, with Diane's support, leading the choir. The Committee will meet regularly to ensure that the outstanding music you expect is not only uninterrupted, but enhanced.

In time, the Music Committee, in concert with the Vestry, will begin a search for a new music director at OSA. Exactly what that will look like, I don't know. We want to take time so we make good decisions.

As I said at the close of my letter to you, my commitment to the ministry of music at OSA is as strong than ever. Music at OSA is such a vital and central part of our spirit and worship, never worry that it will be diminished. I'm excited about the possibilities and invite you to imagine an even more vibrant music program. Please feel free to talk with me, any member of the Music Committee, Vestry, or choir about where we are and where we might go.

You may not think this is a very theological sermon. But remember, the vagaries of life engage us constantly. And, where and how we find Christ in the fabric of the every day needs be what we are about. Just now, the Collect from this morning echoes in my ears: "Grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts."

Amen.

Copyright © 2009. Erl G. Purnell
All rights reserved.