

Sermon: St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Wellesley  
Annual Meeting Sunday  
January 30, 2011

Preacher: Stephen W. Clarke, Outgoing Warden

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Good morning. In what is becoming a tradition, outgoing Wardens at St. Andrew's are afforded the opportunity to preach on the last Sunday of their term of service. Today, that opportunity is afforded to me.

I know many of you well and some of you may know me, mainly as the Warden in the hard hat and construction gloves making a pitch for the recently completed capital campaign. I'd especially like to say what a pleasure it is to be up here today not asking for more capital!

Importantly, I'd like to say how honored I have felt to represent you, as warden for the past four years. It has been a privilege to serve in this capacity and it has been humbling to appreciate the role of God in all of our work at St. Andrew's. And, it has been an amazingly rewarding experience for me to share this journey of faith with all of you.

At a Vestry meeting in late 2006, I recall speaking with then warden Michael Kemp, about what I might do at St. Andrew's looking forward, as my term as Finance Committee Chair was coming to a close. I recall that he said that "there might be a higher calling for you." At the time I didn't have the faintest idea what he meant. But later that same evening, Addison asked me to join him in his office as he wanted to speak with me about a "private matter."

For those of you who haven't been in our Rector's office, he has a fuzzy, sheepskin covered chair where I have since learned that many great conversations have taken place, but also, in which a great many callings have been made. Addison sat me in that chair and asked me to consider being a Warden. In hindsight, I wish I had thought to ask what the job paid!

Even though I had been on the Vestry for three years, I really did not completely comprehend what a Warden did, only that they seemed to spend a lot of time in meetings. So I told Addison that while I was honored to be considered, I would need to give it some thought and talk it over with my wife, Elizabeth. Our children were ages 3, 8 and 9 at the time and despite the related responsibilities with that and the travel schedule of my full time job, we determined that we would somehow make it all work.

So I said yes to Addison and it turns out that it proved to be one of my most rewarding decisions and in reflecting, I have since been struck by the role of the Holy Spirit in that decision and the wonderful influence of God in our work here during these past years.

In our first reading today, in Paul's letters to the Corinthians, Paul writes, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." The notion being offered here is that even given all of the considerable resources available to us, especially here at St. Andrew's, there are aspects of all of our endeavors and accomplishments that are up to God alone. There is a humility that comes from knowing that we are put on this earth by God to do his work and only with the help of the Lord can we achieve it. That humility is front and center in Jesus's teachings in the beatitudes which we've just heard.

In reflecting on the past four years at St. Andrew's, I have realized how frequently God's will and the Holy Spirit have been evident in our work here. For me, this is especially clear with the benefit of the opportunity to reflect on our recent past in writing this sermon. God has guided us and has helped us to accomplish much.

At the onset of my first Warden term, God's hand was evident in the integration of the service league into the Vestry-led ministries of the Parish. With a Vestry equally led by women and men, God guided us through a transition which rather than being a difficult break with past tradition, was a celebration of the work of the Service League and an honoring of its traditions of service in outreach to those less fortunate, parish fellowship and support for the ministries of St. Andrew's.

We have been blessed by God with four gifted, energetic and caring Clergy who lead us each week in worship. I personally have been blessed by wise and effective co-wardens and wardens who preceded and will succeed me. We have been blessed with Vestries who are deep in experience and devotion to St. Andrew's and have handled challenging issues with grace and balanced judgment. Opening prayers at Vestry meetings often contain the following reference:

"In the words of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who is now with us, and who taught us to pray..." followed by the Lord's prayer. It is interesting over time to consider and recall the ways in which Jesus's teachings manifested themselves in that Vestry room and the Holy Spirit guided thinking, dialogue and decisions brought forward for the parish.

Perhaps nowhere is God's will more evident than in the inspired work of St. Andrew's in outreach in Honduras, Boston's South End and in coastal Mississippi where we have been guided by God to answer the call of our fellow world citizens in need. God has led us to lend assistance to the poor, the endangered and those seeking to recover and the act of so doing has been a blessing for all who have participated in these outreach ministries. Through our work with Christ Church, Bay St. Louis, where we are currently celebrating the culmination of our partnership, God has helped us to play an important role in the rebuilding of that congregation which was so badly damaged by hurricane Katrina.

We are further grateful for God's help in creating and fostering the wonderful vitality of our Christian learning programs. Led and supported by the calling of an Associate Rector for Christian Education and a Christian Learning Assistant, our Christian education programs foster lifelong learning opportunities at St. Andrew's for our children through our most senior parishioners. The expansion of our Christian learning team to include two so talented individuals to form the foundation of our education efforts has been a longstanding St. Andrew's aspiration that has now been realized.

With God's help we have been increasingly good stewards financially, of all of our Parish ministries, of our worship space and our building and grounds. Having established the St. Andrew's "Connects" program and completed the "O Ye Fire and Heat, Bless Ye the Lord!" capital campaign successfully, in these trying economic times, we are so grateful to God. I must admit that there were times during the capital campaign when I questioned whether we would reach the \$1 million mark, and yet, in the end, we successfully achieved our revised goal of \$1.3 million thanks to God's inspiration in the generosity of nearly 200 current and former parish families and friends.

It is with thanks to God that we have been able to accomplish these amazing things. God has given us the enormous joy of working together and we have much in which to rejoice and be grateful. He has given me the great personal joy of getting to know so many of you in this community of Faith in ways I might never have had the opportunity to do, had I not said yes to Addison four years ago. While I pray for forgiveness for the things that we have left undone, I am grateful to God for the opportunity to serve this parish and for the personal growth this has afforded me and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout the journey.

Amen.