

ST. MARY'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

April 4, 2019

Dearly Beloved,

Recently a parishioner shared with me her surprise that our *"Sharing Homily"* has been harder than she expected. She enjoyed hearing another person's story and found it easy to be a good listener. Sharing is harder than listening she discovered. I have been pondering our conversation, wondering if this fits the expression "it's easier to give than to receive." Many of us would give someone the shirt off our back; we would do anything we could to help someone. We think of ourselves as kind and generous in this way. And, indeed, we are!

My wondering led me to ask do we trust that others will give to us when we are in need. Will we be cared for in the way we would offer to someone else? Do we trust that the love we show others, others will show us? We could take this question further and reflect on how it feels to us to trust that God is with us. Do we believe God is giving us everything that we need right now?

St. Mary's is at a crossroads that invites us to trust one another and to trust deeply that God is with us. This is exactly why I have invited us to this parish Lenten "experiment," each Sunday having a *"Sharing Homily."* Why, you ask, why? Because we need to know one other. We need to learn each other's names, hear each other's stories, and grow our relationships. We need to have courageous conversation together. This Lenten parish "experiment" feels just right for us at this time, giving us an opportunity to come together.

On March 31, we had our *"Fifth Sunday"* combined worship service. Following worship, over 30 parishioners stayed for brunch and conversation. We had a financial update from the Treasurer and then members of the Vestry shared their feelings about this challenging time we are in – accepting that, with the financial realities, we must change.

It is time to talk openly about the future of St. Mary's – How will we fund the current deficit? How might we expand our collaborative efforts? Is it time for St. Mary's to consider merging with another Episcopal Church? Is it time for us to find new ministry partners?

What is God up to with us? As we are discovering, our calling to adapt is also a calling to come together. Your Vestry is working very hard to gather information, explore all the options, and we need you! We need everyone to be "all in" this together.

My prayer for us comes from scripture. From Paul's Prayer for the Philippians (1:9), he says, ***And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best***

While uncomfortable, I know God is with us as we stretch ourselves, perhaps in ways we might not seek out or even desire. It is time for us to put aside our personal preferences and ask what is best for the good of St. Mary's and how we can best participate in God's mission.

Our next stretch is into the holiest days, from Palm Sunday through Holy Week, to the Day of Resurrection. We have beautiful services planned with combined choir from St. Mary's, Concordia and Emanuel Lutheran Churches. We hope you will join us:

The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday, 7:30 am (spoken) & 9:00 am at St. Mary's
10:00 am at Concordia; 8:45 am & 10:30 am at Emanuel

Maundy Thursday, 7:30 pm at Emanuel


Good Friday, 7:30 pm at Concordia

The Great Vigil of Easter, 7:30 pm at St. Mary's

The Day of Resurrection: Easter Sunday, 7:30 am & 9:00 am (both with music)
10:00 am at Concordia; 8:45 am & 10:45 am at Emanuel

May we journey with Jesus through these days of Lent to arrive with amazement at the Day of Resurrection, when we shout with joy, "Alleluia, Christ is Risen!" "The Lord is risen indeed!" May God bless you on your journey with Jesus and may your heart be open to how the Spirit of God is calling us to change!

In Christ's Peace,


The Reverend Ann Lovejoy Johnson
Rector