

For the last five years, I have been your Rector and you have been my people. We have journeyed together through good times and bad. Now it is time to sever that relationship. I will no longer be your Rector. God willing, a new Rector will be appointed by the Bishop soon. That person will take over to fulfill the position as your spiritual leader. They will be the one to council you, pray with you, baptise you or your children, visit you, lead you in studies, guide you in meetings, keep you on track to fulfilling God's mission, represent you to the wider community, bless you, perform the sacraments, and for some, he or she will be the one to bury you. My love for each of you continues but my role as your rector ends to make way to welcome the new rector. Allow this to happen to allow your new rector to fulfill their role.

For now, I leave you in the capable hands of your interim priest, Nancy, until your new rector takes over. Bless her, pray for her and give her your support as God prepares you for your new rector and your new rector for you. May God bless you on your journey ahead.

I want to leave you with a final lesson though. When I gave my first sermon here, I compared us to sticks. One stick has a certain amount of strength, but many sticks have much more strength.

Little did we imagine the strength we would need to get through the five years we spent together. We had a couple of years to gather ourselves into one, strong bundle and then a pandemic took over the world and turned our lives upside down. We could not gather for church. We could not gather for Tuesday Group or meditation, or Men's breakfast, or making mincemeat. We could not hold bazaars or meals.

We had to quickly find ways to continue to worship the God we love. We learned to worship together through the internet. We learned what

Zoom was. We delivered flowers to each woman's doorstep on Mother's Day. We made phone calls. We held church on the lawn.

But we longed for a chance to come back into this beautiful building and worship God as one body again.

Slowly, restrictions were lifted, and we returned. We kept masks on and kept our social distance, but it felt good to meet in person for those who dared. Several times, we had to return to online worship only and then came back again. Just over a year ago, it looked like we might actually be able to celebrate Christmas in the church building. And then, I went into the hospital, getting out on Christmas Eve. I remained off for a couple of weeks but came back as soon as I could and we gathered again.

But I still was not well. I did what I could but the pain became too much and in September I had to go off again. Little did we know that I would not return as your rector. The pain got worse, but I was finally booked for surgery, that was not guaranteed to help. While I waited, I came to the difficult decision that I could not continue if the pain did not end with surgery and the best answer was that I take early retirement. A very difficult decision. But just as I told you that first Sunday, I am just one small branch in our strong bundle.

You have what it takes to stay strong. Most importantly, Jesus. As Christians, we all believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that He is one with God. We believe that he became incarnate and was born of the virgin Mary. We believe Jesus lived into his 30s and was hung on a cross after being beaten near to death. He died on that cross and three days later he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven.

Now a non-Christian might hear this and say, “So what? What makes you want to be a Christian? Why do you worship a man who died on a cross? What makes you so strong?”

Many of us, hear that question, and our stomach tightens. We begin to sweat. It is that dreaded thing, EVANGELISM. Brrrrr.

We are quite comfortable saying our prayers. We come to church regularly. We help out at church. We give of our time talents and treasure. But when someone mentions evangelism, we run the other way just as fast as our feet will carry us!

We picture having to go door to door asking people if they have found Jesus. Evangelism has been painted as a very forceful, in your face kind of thing these days. And that just may not be our cup of tea!

But what does scripture tell us about evangelism? What did Jesus say? The overwhelming answer in our New Testament is “Come and See”. Not, repent or spend all eternity in a place of eternal fire and gnashing of teeth in constant pain, but come and see.

We first hear these words from the lips of Jesus at the very outset of his ministry. In John 1:38-39, a couple of his first followers ask him “Rabbi, where are you staying?” and he says, “Come and See.” They go with him, they see the place, and they stay with him. This is as basic a story of evangelism as one can find in the Gospel.

“Come and See”. The scriptures are filled with stories telling people to come and see. Come and see what all of this is about. Come and see who this Jesus is.

Think of the woman of Samaria who encounters Jesus at Jacob’s well and receives from him the water of new life, and how she goes and says

to the people in the city, “Come and see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” (John 4:29)

Think of the Greeks who say, “We wish to see Jesus”, (John 12:20) and of how Andrew speaks to Philip and together they say, “Come and see”.

To “Mary Magdalene in the garden, a risen Lord says, “Come and See. I am risen. Now, go and tell the other disciples.” (John 20: 11-18)

To the disciples in an Upper Room he says, “Come and See” as he shows them his hands and his side. (John 20: 19-20)

To Thomas who doubted the report of the disciples, he says, “Come and See”. “Put your finger here, reach out our hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” (John 20: 27)

To Peter, as he and Jesus stroll along the lakeshore, “Come and See”, Come and see the plan I have for you to shepherd my flock. (John 21: 15-17)

To Saul of Tarsus, to whom he appears on the road to Damascus, “Come and See”, “Come and see the plans I have for you to be the apostle to the Gentiles.” (Acts 9: 1-15)

You have a question about Jesus? Come and see him in action at the Community Pantry. You want to hear more about Jesus, come and see Him proclaimed at St James. Or come and see Jesus while we visit the sick or take care of the widows. Come and see how Jesus grows in us as we study the scriptures. Come and see how Jesus helps us forgive others. Come and see how Jesus helps us love others. Come and see.

That sounds simple, doesn't it? Well, it is. It was what Jesus did. All His life was about showing people what God is really like and in turn what

we can become more like. So, what is our responsibility when someone asks about Jesus? Come and see!

But right now, the words of this poem based on Ecclesiastes 3 seem to say what I need to say.

Time to give thanks

This is a time to give thanks,
for the times of challenge and hardship
for the times of tiredness and distress
for the times of solidarity and justice with peace.

We give thanks

for the times of unfinished business and uncertainty
for the times of failure and disappointment
for the times of heartbreak and loss

We give thanks

for the times of joy and elation
for the times of connection and wonder
for the times of community and healing.

We give thanks.

This is a time to remember,
a time to invite Spirit,
a time to celebrate,
a time to shed tears,
a time to notice your heart,
a time to move on,
a time to let go,
a time to breathe deeply,
a time to trust,
a time to retire.