

**Homily presented by the Venerable G. Douglas Fenton, DD at the Induction of the Reverend Vivian Lam as Rector of St. John the Apostle, Port Moody.  
December 12, 2018**

*Isaiah 40: 1-11; Ps 96; Mt 18: 12-14*

As we find ourselves moving through this season of Advent, we are reminded by Fr Boone Porter, an Anglican Church history and liturgics scholar, that “Advent speaks **first** of Christ’s future coming to judge the world at the end of history, **secondly** of his historic coming into our world two thousand years ago, and **thirdly** of his present coming into our hearts and lives.”<sup>i</sup> Future, past, present.

In our parish life we use the same pattern of rehearsing what we want our future to be by first reflecting on our past and reminding ourselves of our present. It’s not an unfamiliar practice to us. Likewise, we consider these same three classic questions when we prepare to clarify the hopes and dreams in the next chapter of a parish’s ministry and the work they will do with their new Rector:

1. Where have you been?
2. Where are you now?
3. Where do you want to be in five-ten-fifteen years?

These are critical questions. Even more so are the answers.

This formula is not only the framework by which we prepare for understanding our parish. It is for us at the heart of our journey of faith in Christ. In the Eucharistic prayer we rehearse the same sequence when we say Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Past. Present. Future.

We remember our past – our story – our roots. It’s a biblical tradition. The Hebrew text is filled with reminders of how our ancestors in the faith did the same thing. Our witness to God’s purpose in our parish is the same. Re-telling our own stories of who we are, where we came from and when we, personally, joined the community is very important. It’s a way of putting ourselves ‘back together’.

To answer where we are now is a way to locate ourselves in a particular moment in time. Looking around ourselves, taking stock, considering what we value and what we can let go of to begin a new thing.

Where are we going is the big question that many parishes struggle to answer with clarity. Identifying the clear vision and purpose. Where do we want to go? What do we need to get there and what gifts do we need in our priest to help us get there? Big, big questions. Everyone thinks it – doesn't always say it aloud and it needs to be said aloud – but everyone wants to grow – we all want more people participating in the enterprise of the gospel. So other questions follow:

1. How do we want to create a generous and welcoming and hospitable place?
2. What does a generous welcome look like?
3. How do we create a venue that is functional and appropriate to the need while at the same time communicating the good news?
4. How do we identify the gifts and abilities and capacity we have to respond to expressed needs for children, for elders, for those at our door whether it is for Christian formation, pastoral care and visiting or food and shelter?
5. What do we do first?
6. What are the priorities when we may not be able to do it all right away?

These questions will lead you on this very active journey you're a part in this place. How did you get to this moment in time is something that I am meant to remind us of – right after the homily. Well what if we cut to the chase?

Archdeacon Grant Rodgers, your former rector, resigned to take on a new role at Vancouver School of Theology and after consultation, the Archbishop appointed the Reverend Stephanie Shepard to come and be your interim priest and guide you through a period of reflection and discernment. You wrote a parish profile, advertised and got some amazing priests who, together with you, discerned whether they were being called by God to be your next rector. Your profile had a list of 'Who We Seek': if you don't remember the list the keys characteristics are:

1. Not to be afraid to ask tough questions
2. Willing to guide in study, justice and faith
3. Comfortable challenging the status quo
4. Connected with the wider diocese
5. Energetic, persistent, lead and collaborate

## 6. Experience with capital fundraising

You held the list up against the Reverend Vivian Lam and said – yes, this is an amazing match. You discerned that Mother Vivian had what you wanted, you recommended to the Archbishop that she be appointed and the Archbishop agreed.

I've known Vivian and worked with her on several projects for over the past 16 years. 16 years! [I know I don't look old enough to have known her that long – but it's true!] I can attest to you that you have chosen a priest who prays, who has an unwavering faith, and a fearless tenacity. Vivian is a true shepherd, seeking out the least, the last and the lost – caring tenderly for those committed to her care. She is one who listens with intention, calls out the best in others and prods and probes to get to the core of an idea or problem or possibility.

Vivian is one who will insist on collaboration, on partnership and on the entire community's engagement. Just one warning: Vivian does not suffer wall-flowers gladly. She will ask you tough questions and remember that when she does you asked for a priest who would do so. Expect to be challenged—remember, you asked to be challenged. She will be persistent. Remember you asked her to be persistent. Expect to be called forth to offer the gifts you have been given. And know this: in doing this work together the Christ on whom we wait will be made present in this place.

In your Parish Profile your mission statement reads: *The Parish of St. John the Apostle is called to be a spirited Community at the heart of Port Moody, transformed through the experience of the presence of Christ and sent out to share God's Love.*

I noticed in your parish profile that the word transformation is connected to worship, bible study, Godly Play and Education for Ministry. I wonder if 'transformation' is not the key word which underlies the vision that St John's has for itself.

We are told that the mission is an action which allows us to achieve our vision. I imagine that at its best St John's vision is bringing about the New Community that Isaiah imagines in today's reading. A place where those from the margins are brought to the centre, those who have been disenfranchised are returned to the rightful place, and those who are lost are found again and filled with value and dignity. Vivian will be alongside you in this work.

Through Isaiah's prophecy we hear 'A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God' with valleys lifted up, mountains and hills made low, uneven ground leveled, and rough places made a plain. What do we need to do to make this happen? "Get up to a high mountain...lift up your voice with strength -- tell out the good news even from the mountain top: "Here is your God!" The Psalm (96) tells us that the whole of creation is participating in God's glory : the heavens, the earth, the sea.. all the trees of the wood shout for joy before the Lord when God comes to judge the earth.

"Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all people shall see it together'.

This glory of the Lord--what does it look like?

Isaiah tell us that it looks like this: God will feed his flock like a shepherd.

I don't need to remind you that the image of shepherd and sheep figures significantly in our faith story. And certainly any of you who have had the opportunity to travel to the land from where our biblical stories originate will know that shepherds and sheep are still core elements to the agrarian culture in the Holy Land.

Abraham, Moses, David, Amos – to name a few area all shepherds at one point in time or another in their careers and early in St Luke's gospel we meet shepherds who are among the first to hear the good news of the birth of Jesus. Scholars tell us that shepherds were kept to the boundaries of the community – understood to be unclean and therefore marginalized. They made their homes outside living near the animals they cared for.

Isaiah says that God will feed his flock like a shepherd; [God] will gather his lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom and gently lead the mother sheep. (Is 40:11)

And today's gospel portrays the one who is interested in the least, the last and the lost.

The one who is marginalized. The one who is missing. The one who is overlooked or disregarded. Whether the person be a child or an elder or someone in – between all are equally precious to the shepherd no matter how large the flock.

In preparation for tonight, as a parish you recalled where you came from, who you are and by God's grace to be transformed into bearers of God's good news in this place. You discerned that you need a priest like who will challenge and lead and persist and collaborate. You are so blessed to have Vivian as your rector. Together as priest and

people, God is giving you the ability to be a witness to a place that communicates God's generous love, unlimited welcome, gracious hospitality that is easily accessible to all.

Lift up your voice – St John the Apostle – herald of good tidings – lift up your voice with strength and say 'Here is your God!'

Isa. That good news that you have been proclaiming for generations is bringing you to life again, and the promise of great and wonderful things beyond your imagining are waiting to be discovered.

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<sup>i</sup> Boone Porter in *The Living Church*, Dec 18, 1977, p 13.



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