

**St Thomas, Chilliwack – April 30<sup>th</sup> 2017 (Easter 3)**

**The retirement of the Reverend John Sovereign**

***+May we see Christ in the breaking of the bread, Amen***

Last Saturday morning there was an enthusiastic knock on our front door. I assumed it was the JW's as they are known to frequent our neighbourhood and for a while I had opened the door and had a chat. Then I stopped and eventually they stopped coming round.

Anyway at the door were a young woman and her dad. They wanted to know if I was selling a Mazda 3 on Craig's List. I replied I didn't have such a car. The girl checked her phone and read out to me my home address. I realised after a minute or two that my daughter has such a car as does her soon-to-be husband. However I had no idea if it was black and no idea if it was being sold. No one had told me.

So I called my daughter ... no answer. Then I called my other daughter (as I was the only person at home) and she said ... yes ... the black car is for sale. News to me! So I told the couple to hang on and I called my putative son-in-law. He was on route but surprised that they had arrived at our home at that time. Well more about that a little later!

This is the third Sunday after Easter and in this parish it is the end of an era. John is retiring today from ordained ministry and we first want to offer both he and Allyson our grateful thanks for his ministry and their presence in this parish. We also want to offer them every blessing as they start out on the next part of the journey of life.

John has been Rector of St Thomas for a good number of years (11) and also served as Regional Dean of Valley (the parishes at this end of the Diocese) until the end of last year.

During the time John has been in the parish Jennifer Burgoyne was ordained deacon, the governance of the parish has been overhauled and many building related projects have been undertaken. Sometimes when you look at churches they seem like we don't love them as much as we say we do. Well when you look at the structure of St Thomas, the Church and the Hall ... this is not the case. For the team here, led by John have worked tirelessly to paint inside and outside, to renovate the Hall and install a commercial grade kitchen, there is a new furnace, there is a state of the art sound system, and other electrical and mechanic systems have been upgraded or replaced. I guess that is what happens when you have as your rector someone who prior to ordination was a builder. To my point, I was not a builder before ordination, in fact I wasn't much of anything in those days, and as a result our parish is planning to knock our church down and build another. But I am straying from the point.

John and the team have done remarkable work on the fabric on the buildings and as a result they are in good shape as St Thomas moves forward in its life as a parish. It is a good legacy that John leaves as he retires.

At the same time we realise there are challenges to being the Church in 2017. In common with many parishes St Thomas has seen its income reduced. At this time the parish seeks to employ a half-time priest to work with the parish leadership as it moves forward. This is the time to work together to build on the good work you have done together in the last decade and before, to enable St Thomas to be the Church it has the potential to be. You have many assets in your favour: you have an active leadership group, a good congregational base, an attractive and historical Church and your hall complex in good repair and well decorated. You are in a prime position in your city.

My sense is that ministry is about facing the challenges of the moment and seeing what lies ahead. The work is never easy and straight forward but with a sense of vision and determination you can build on what you have and grow as a result. But more on that subject another time.

Today we heard the wonderful narrative (by Luke) of the post-resurrection appearance of Jesus usually called the Road to Emmaus.

Let us recount what occurs. On the day of resurrection two of the disciples (but not from the twelve) are walking from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus, which we are told, is just seven miles away. The disciples are talking about what had just happened to their leader; how he had died on the cross. As they walk Jesus comes alongside them, but they did not recognise him. Jesus asks why they looking sad and they explain how Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified, but that some women had found his tomb empty and how 'a vision of angels' said Jesus was alive. Jesus then tells the disciples that it was necessary that the Messiah suffer before entering into his glory. He also taught them about Moses and all the prophets.

When they arrived at Emmaus Jesus went as if to continue on but the disciples (one named Cleopas) asked him to stay with them. Then comes the crucial moment in this passage: when Jesus joins them at the table, and we are told he *'took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them'*. At that precise moment the disciples knew who Jesus was and he then disappeared from their sight.

Our Christian pilgrimage is about recognising Christ in the break of bread. As we join for worship, as bread is blessed, broken and given to us, we enter into Christ's life and death. We are changed, we are transformed.

When we come to the Eucharist we bring with us our burdens and sorrows as well as our joys. We offer these to God through prayer and confession. Together as the body of Christ we share in the bread, blessed, broken and given to us. Christ renews us by this action and we leave Church changed people. If during the week we have found life

difficult and we have been down cast and discouraged, by sharing together in the breaking of bread, we are made whole once more. We are restored and encouraged in the challenges of our lives. We are supported and cared for by the prayers and concern of each other.

As we journey, as we walk together as part of the body of Christ, may we always be renewed by the breaking of bread, for in it Christ is always made known to us.

Next Sunday the Eucharist will be celebrated as usual at St Thomas. John though won't be here. However the worship of the Church of God will continue week by week as it has done since the Church was built.

Today we thank John warmly for his contribution to the life of the Church in this parish over the last 11 years. For the hospital visits, the care home services, the baptisms, wedding and funerals. For the times he was there for you as an individual and as a community. For all the improvements to the fabric and internal systems in the buildings, so that you have a plant of which you can be duly proud and which is ready to receive new members. John now begins a new phrase in his life as does this parish. And John we send you out with God's blessing, as well as our thoughts and prayers for a long and fulfilling retirement.

We will pray and work with the parish leaders in this time of transition and into the next phrase of ministry. The Wardens will be responsible for the on-going administration in the short term until a priest in charge is appointed to work alongside you all. Jennifer will continue in her ministry as deacon in the parish offering both spiritual and pastoral support as part of her ministry. The Wardens know where to seek support and guidance from the Bishop, myself and the Executive Archdeacon.

We ask that God continue to bless this parish in its work that it may build on what has been and seek to continue to grow and develop as a place of prayer, refuge and welcome.

Well you might be interested to know that as of today the Mazda 3 remain unsold. But no one had shared with me the news that it was for sale and I might have sent the girl and her dad away before they had even taken a look.

And my point, we come to Church because we love and follow Christ and want others to know and hear his message too. It therefore remains our responsibility to draw others to hear the good news that we, like Cleopas and the other disciple, may explain how Jesus is made known to us in the breaking of the bread. Amen