



## **St. Philip's Church: The Induction of The Rev. Stuart Hallam**

### **John 15:9-16**

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

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My former diocesan bishop, Greg Rickel, tells a story about going with his wife Marti to a casual breakfast restaurant where they were seated in a booth right next to a young couple and their four-year-old daughter. Both Greg and Marti and the young family had just ordered their food and had begun that in-between time of waiting for their meal and wondering what it would actually look and taste like, especially as compared to the pictures on the menu.

Almost immediately, the little girl in the booth next to them began talking about what she had ordered. "I'm going to have strawberry pancakes!" she whispered excitedly to her parents. To this, her parents murmured their affirmation: "Yes, honey, you're going to have strawberry pancakes."

A few minutes passed. "I love strawberry pancakes!" She then told her parents in a voice that was a little bit louder. The parents laughed and said: "Of course you do, honey!" A few more minutes passed. "Where are my strawberry pancakes?" the little girl asked, loud enough to be heard by most people in the area of the restaurant where they were seated. The parents,

laughed an embarrassed laugh, and gently tried to shush her by telling her that her pancakes would be out in a minute.

As you can imagine, in what turned out to be an overly long wait for breakfast, these same declarations and questions (with minor variations) continued to occur. Each time the parents reassured their daughter of her good choice and of the fact that, though it was taking a long time, her pancakes would indeed arrive.

But, of course, because the little girl was only four years old, she did not fully understand the concept of patient waiting. And so finally, in one last attempt to express her expectation and her urgency, she stood up on the booth seat and, jumping up and down, began to shout: “Strawberry pancakes! Strawberry pancakes! Strawberry pancakes!”

Waiting and the expectations that mount with waiting can be very, very tricky. It is, of course, energizing and exciting to look forward to the arrival of something good. It can be energizing and even more exciting as the time of waiting is extended. And, at the same time, when we have to wait for something, expectations have a way of becoming bigger, of becoming inflated, so much so, in fact, that at times when the long awaited person or event or even pancakes arrive, they can never really measure up to the expectations we are ready to lay upon them. Waiting and the expectations that come with waiting can be very, very tricky.

All of us here know better than most about what it is to wait expectantly for something wonderful to happen, for we have all waited months and months for this day, for the celebration of the new ministry of this parish in collaboration with its new incumbent Stuart Hallam, with its bishop and with the larger diocese to officially begin. And the heck of it is we, all of us, chose this path, this path of extended waiting.

For the parish this has meant, the ending of one interim period and the beginning of another period in which The Rev Harold Munn has been priest in charge. For Stuart and his family, Laura and Matilda, it has meant a long, long goodbye and an extended period of waiting for the beginning of a new life here in Canada. For the rest of us it has meant various things—for me, a kind of time of wonder growing excitement and curiosity about what’s going to happen next here at St. Philip’s. For others, it’s meant a kind of, “Gosh—this much be pretty special for the parish and for this new incumbent to wait this long to begin their life together.”

And so it feels a bit like the pressure is on, and everyone’s expectations are high. These high expectations are enhanced by the already strong reputation of St. Philip’s in our diocese and the equally outstanding background and experience of its new incumbent. And, as I’ve said, there’s something good about this, something energizing about this—and there is something very, very tricky about it, something important to watch, something to hold with an open hand, something, with God’s help, to manage.

Our Gospel for tonight is taken from Jesus’ long farewell discourse in the Gospel of John which is addressed both to the disciples and to us as we live in a time after Jesus’ departure. In that discourse we hear what Jesus’ hopes and dreams and, yes, expectations are of all us as we embrace a life that abides in the love of God that was made manifest in Jesus’ own life.

Notice what Jesus does not say about how we will be able to do this. He does not say that you and I are to aspire to be outstanding in all we do together. He does not say that you and I are to aspire to achieve every goal we set for ourselves. He does not say that we should aspire never to let each other down or never to go through a rough patch. Rather, he says over and over again that everything we do is to flow from the confidence that we, all of us, are mysteriously, irrevocably and unshakably beloved of God. Anything we are able to do, and I believe we are able to do great things together, is to flow from that foundation, and no other.

And so what this means is that Stuart with all of his accomplishments, with all of his experience, with all of his expertise, is beloved of God, not on account of any of those outstanding things, but on account of the love of God made real and available to him through Jesus. It means that all of you here at St. Philip's with all your accomplishments, all your experiences, all your expertise, are beloved of God not on account of any of those outstanding things about you but on account of the love of God made real and available to you through Jesus. It means that I and the other clergy and well-wishers here tonight with all our accomplishments, all our experiences and all our expertise are beloved of God not on account of any of those admirable things but on account of the love of God made real and available to us through Jesus. And, finally, it means that those in the Dunbar neighbourhood and in the Vancouver area, those outside these doors are, just like you and me, beloved of God on account of the love of God made real and available through Jesus.

In other words, we, you and I, (and they) are all on equal footing before God and in God. We have all been made God's friends and the way we are to be with each other, the work we are to do with each other is to be friends of God and friends with one another. We are to be friends who spend time together, friends who rest again and again in a sense of mutual dignity and worth, friends who let themselves be themselves with one another, friends who tell each other the truth, friends who forgive each other when we mess up and who stick around afterwards to work out whatever needs to be worked out in the friendship.

Greg Rickel did not finish the story about the little girl and her strawberry pancakes in the talk he was giving the day I first heard that story. And so you and I will never know whether those strawberry pancakes lived up to the ragingly powerful expectations the little girl worked up while she waited for them to come to the table.

Tonight, however, we get to live a portion of a different story. It's the story of a group of God's friends who have chosen to go on a journey together, remembering that God loves them and, wants them, above all, to live from that love. And it's the story of another table, a different table—a table where the friends of God are free to bring their expectations, their hopes and their fears, all to be broken, all to be blessed and all to be returned to them as food for the journey they begin today.