

Sermon
St. Mary Nanoose Bay
March 4, 2018
3rd Sunday in Lent / AVM
John 2:13-22

"Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

I've heard it said many times that the church is a business. But church is not a business. It has business to attend to, yes, business to take care of, for sure. But the bottom line of a church is not its profit margin.

The biggest difference between a religious institution and a business is the way we vision. In church, we work to discern God's vision and manifest it here on earth. Our vision energizes us to bring the kingdom of God closer and more visible. There is no bottom line; only an expanding, inclusive circle.

This past week, as I've already told you, I was at a chaplains' conference in Texas where I met 30 other chaplains from across North America to learn and share together. It was fascinating to learn all the different things chaplains do. Many teach classes, coach sport and lead service groups out into the community among other things in addition to leading chapel services. One chaplain told me about the philosophy class he teaches called "Search for Meaning." In this course, a small group of 17 year olds have 2 ½ months to come up with a question that captures what a meaningful life would look like. The question is one that they choose as a guide for their lives. Want to hear the question? OK...

“If you were to die today, would you be content, who would miss you and what would your legacy be?” Repeat.

I was so moved when I heard this question; imagining the young people thinking about, wrestling with, struggling through weeks of wonder and debate to come up with such a pointed question. Wouldn't this be a great question for all of us to consider individually?

In less than an hour, we are going over to the church hall to have our Annual Vestry Meeting. And I want to suggest that this question is a wonderful way to enter into the discussions we will have.

As St. Mary's Anglican Church, if we were to cease to be – *Would we be OK with that? Who would miss us? What would our legacy be?* There's so much talk these days about the church dying. And I believe in self-fulfilling prophecies. We can buy into a picture of a doomed church and create a vision of the end. Or we can look around us, at our thriving Community Dinners, at our bustling HUB Wednesdays, at all the connections that have been made - person to person - over the relatively short life of this church in this community. We can look around this morning, take in the beauty of this building, take note of all the people participating in this liturgy and listen to the voices rising up together in prayer and music. This church, this community is not only alive, it's thriving! And I think that's because we are responding to the needs of the particular community we find ourselves in, in a warm, authentic and welcoming way. And there's a palpable spirit alive in our worship.

Yes, we will have to talk money, budgets, finance. But can we do that in light of our vision? In service of a vision that excites, motivates

and draws us into our future? Some of you might remember the book, “Do What You Love and the Money will Follow”? I’m not suggesting that this always works but an interesting twist on the title for us here at St. Mary’s might be, “Follow whom you love and money won’t be the stumbling block”!!

So let’s take the money out of the temple for the time being and envision our legacy. How do we want St. Mary’s to look 10 years from now? How do we want to pay it forward to the village of Nanoose, to the Christians who will follow us?

I invite you to close your eyes for a couple of minutes. Imagine St. Mary’s flourishing. What would that look like? Don’t hold back.... let the “impossible” become possible; just for these few moments.....

..... Open your eyes.

If we can imagine it, we can realize it. If we are committed, the resources will follow. If we pay it forward, we will leave a legacy that serves God and neighbour in ways we could never imagine.....

And now, I’d like to end by mixing up the program up a bit and inviting you to stand and say the doxology together (in your bulletin at the end); and if you’re comfortable, let’s say it this time with our eyes open, looking around at all the other visionaries.

Glory to God, whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. Glory to God, from generation to generation, in the Church, and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever, AMEN!!! (So be it!)