

Feast of St. James – 30 July 2017
Jeremiah 45:1-5; Acts:11:27 – 12:3; Matthew 20:20-28

This morning we have gathered to worship God, to celebrate our St. James Family and to be encouraged as we continue to move forward into God's plans for His Church. This is an important day upon which we celebrate because it brings into convergence the past, the present and the future.

We are here because well over one hundred years ago, the Anglicans of Nova Scotia recognized that God's mission was calling them to reach out to the people beyond the city boundary and out into the County. We began as a Mission of St. Mark's Anglican Church, worshipping first in a school then moving on to a church proper and then, 50 years ago, into this present structure that we call our worshipping home.

Today we are not at a crossroads per se, but rather at a Round About that leads people right past our spiritual home as they head for their own homes every day of the week. We are a visible sign, for those who have eyes to see, that God is present in this community and we are here waiting to welcome them to our spiritual home, which we are more than willing to include them in.

Tomorrow we will be where? God has plans for this Church and our Community but we are not living into our future just yet. What might God be calling us to do? Who is God calling us to become? We cannot yet know with any certainty exactly what the answers to those questions will be, but we can know, just by looking at the world around us, that our tomorrow cannot look anything like what we have known in our yesterdays or even in our todays. Our tomorrows will need to be different simply because the world is different...

I would like you to take a moment to imagine yourself as part of the congregation of St. Mark's of so many years ago ... Imagine the Annual Meeting in which the Rector shared a dream that spoke of God calling you to do something new, and probably very scary. You were invited to start thinking about Church not as simply the place where you worshipped comfortably alongside the people you had always known and worshipped beside. You were being invited to volunteer to move outside your comfort zone to start worshipping in a school house "out there" with the great 'unwashed' of the County.

Your Rector is sharing with you the Vision that God has given that calls the Church to reach out to those who have no church. God has called the comfortable Christians to become uncomfortable to the end that even more people would hear the Good News of Jesus Christ and, hence, might have the chance to choose to participate in the salvation that is waiting for them!

I imagine that you, along with others, might have been thinking to yourselves, 'My God, my God, why hast the Rector forsaken me? How could he expect me to go *over there* to all those strangers that I don't know and start talking about my faith with them?'

God, through the Rector, however, may have had a longer plan in mind. What if his question was not that you would go out into Armdale – all the way in the County – to go knocking door to door inviting people to go to a new church, but rather he was asking you to go out into Armdale to be a part of the Community; getting to know the people and discovering who they were and what they needed? What if he was simply asking you to go and build relationships, that might just – when you were both ready – lead to conversations about faith and then, maybe

an invitation to worship at that new Anglican Church? As you sit in that Annual Meeting so many decades ago, are you appalled? Scared? Maybe a bit excited that God sees a future for the Church and is inviting you to participate in it?

As we gather here, in 2017, celebrating our Patronal Feast Day and giving thanks for all that God has done in and through this Church Community since its inception, we are a lot like Saint James, back 2000 years ago. Like him, we face a world that is not Christian. Like him, we have a message about hope and love and forgiveness and everlasting life that very few truly understand in our world today. And like him, we have no promise laid out before us that our efforts will be "successful". However, like Saint James we do have the sure and certain hope that God has indeed called us to be bearers of the Good News of Jesus Christ, and like Saint James, we are called to bring that Good News to the world that we are in – right here, right now.

What is that world we are in right here and right now? Let me share with you a little bit about this world ...

There are many summer Sunday afternoons when I will sit on the front porch of the Rectory and listen to the voices of teenagers cutting through the parking lot, between the Church and the Parish Hall in their sandals and swimsuits as they head across the Rotary to go swimming at Chocolate Lake. We have a group of 4 or 5 children, from just a couple doors down who gather and play in the Cloister Walk between the Church and the Parish Hall. They use the small walls as chairs and tables as they play school and plan their summertime adventures. Sometimes, when there aren't a lot of cars in the parking lot, they ride their bikes and play tag. (Now before you start telling me that there is proof that we should have a bigger Sunday School, let me tell you that these delightful young people are Muslim. They won't be attending our worship services any time soon!)

On any given weekday between 3:30 and 6 pm, hundreds of cars slow down and come to a stop right in front of our Church as they get more and more frustrated about the wait time to finally get through the Rotary as they head home from a long day at work. And any day of the week, at all hours of the day and night, we have people who pull in to our parking lot so that they can change directions, having missed the exit they wanted when traversing the Rotary. We also have people who stop and wait for a while in the parking lot as they make phone calls or pick some one up or drop someone off. We are a waystation for taxi cabs, ambulances and police cruisers.

You might be thinking, 'what does any of this have to do with our Church? This is just traffic on the property ...' Exactly. This 'just traffic' and the property they utilise could be the "County unserved" that the people of St. Mark's reached out to all those years ago that established St. James Armdale as the community we know and love.

What if God is not calling us to populate the church itself on Sunday mornings? What if God is calling us to imagine and discern ways that we can, like the disciples spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles' reading, 'determine that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers in Judea'? What if God is calling us, as the disciples whose land is Armdale at the Rotary, to reach out, each according to our ability, to bring relief to the people who are our neighbours – both permanent (living in this geographical area) and neighbours for moments (as they pass through here day after day)?

What could our Church's ministry look like if we were to move away from thinking about what we need from our Church (keeping in mind that we would still be doing all that we are currently doing for those who are already here) and started looking at how we might help those neighbours I just mentioned? How might we build relationships with them? How might we simply help them to have a better day and to know that, whether they come to join us on Sunday mornings or not, we still value them and show them that God loves them?

How might we become a Community Hub in a world that is eschewing community itself? How might we more faithfully use the incredible resources of property and building and other – tangible and intangible – resources that we have been blessed with by inheritance from those who had the courage to plant this Church as a mission of St. Mark's so many years ago and those who came after them and gave of themselves that we might enjoy the embarrassment of riches we share today?

We have a choice to make. We can choose to live forever as we are living today – and with that choice comes the reality that our forever will end with the end of those who are already here. Or we can choose to pray, imagine, experiment and be astonished by what God might be calling us to right here at the Church at the Rotary. Maybe we can become a Community Centre that invites people to pass through *after* they have paused for a moment. Maybe we can become a Community of Faith that invites people to join us in relationship because *we want to serve them* and not simply so that we can convince them to join us and begin serving as well. Maybe we can become a location of peace and hope and opportunities to share faith with people who learn that trust and community and relationships are not simply going the way of the Dodo Bird but are alive and well and nourished right here at the Church at the Rotary – not just in the pews but on the lawn, and in the parking lot as well.

As we gather for our Garden Party on one of the very lawns I am talking about, I invite you to remember Garden Parties gone by but I also invite you to imagine and dream together about what this community might look like in the future if we were to move out of "this" space and into the rest of the corner of the Kingdom God has entrusted to our care.

What is God calling St. James at the Rotary to in the future? I believe that God is calling us to relationships with those who need us and indeed, need God, even if they don't realize it yet. Together we can build a mission of hope right on the spot that God called the people of St. Mark's to build a mission church that we have come to call our home.

It is our turn to dream and discern and do what God is asking of us ...

The future of this part of God's mission has been placed in our hands. Are we up for it?