

*At your command all things came to be: the vast expanse of interstellar space, galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses and this fragile earth, our island home.*

Good Morning Everyone

In preparation for the stewardship season, Emily asked me if I would preach the sermon today. In a email, she appealed to my role as People's Warden and my involvement as a property liaison and offered to talk to me about it, of course with the hope of convincing me. I read the email and thought about the request. Part of that was thinking, "ok, when could I call Emily and what would that conversation sound like?" Instead, I listened to the conversation in my head, and replied to Emily's email with both sides of the dialogue for us.

Me: Can I do this? I've never given a sermon.

Emily: Of course you can!

Me: I'm nervous

Emily: I will help you

Me: ok thank you I suppose I will.

So here I am to talk to you about what stewardship means to me. I've been a member of St. Peter's since 1994 or so with my husband Ken, and we've baptised and raised our two girls, Brigid and Miriam here. Both Ken and Brigid have stood here in the pulpit, so I shouldn't be surprised that it's my turn. About the only place I've been associated with longer than St. Peter's has been at my employer. My work as an environmental scientist for EPA is not just my job -- it's my vocation. The mission of EPA is Protection of Human Health and the Environment, and is what led me there seeking employment. I see it as a mission of stewardship of my home -- our home. I am called to be a steward of the earth.

Unfortunately even though the earth is my mission, my job keeps me downtown in an office building, at a desk. I

enjoy being outdoors, though, so over the past couple of years i've been hiking a lot -- a lot, considering all the things pulling on my time. I've been making time for connecting with the earth.

One of my favorite places to hike is the Wissahickon Valley. I have to admit that it's my favorite because I can get there in about 25 minutes. This past spring I joined the Friends of the Wissahickon -- the stewards of the park -- as a trail ambassador. As a trail ambassador, I mostly hike around the park and talk to strangers. My kids will tell you that that's there's no real better fit for my personality than that. On any shift, I might welcome newcomers, give directions, thank people for their support of FOW, ask a kid what fun thing she found in the woods that day, and encourage people to be good stewards: take care of the park.

Just like the Wissahickon is my local park home, St. Peter's is, and has been, my spiritual home. I did not grow

up in the Episcopal church, but sought it out much like I seek out the Wissahickon woods. Quite a long time ago, before I was very familiar with the Book of Common Prayer, I was visiting friends and attended an Episcopal church on Mercer Island in Washington State. If any of you have been out to the Pacific Northwest, you know how beautiful it is. The church had stained glass windows that showed a scene of the mountains that are so ubiquitous in the views to the east of Seattle. Yes, even with the notorious cloudy, misty weather, the church had the faith to install beautiful windows that really needed sunlight to show off. We were lucky that morning and the windows were singing the beauty of the earth. Since I was a new to worshiping in the Episcopal church I hadn't heard Eucharistic Prayer C before. That's the one I quoted at the start "at your command all things came to be... this fragile earth, our island home." As I prayed it and looked at the windows, I knew I was in the right place spiritually.

That building, and also this building, and St. Philip in the field (with its magnificent rose window) are part and parcel to our experiences. St. Peter's is a second home. And like any home, like the trails in the Wissahickon, our home gets used, loved, worn out. The functionality of its spaces changes as our needs change.

The vestry had a lot of conversation about the lower level, and our vision. We asked how our vision for St. Peter's is being met by our space and more importantly, how it can better align with our mission. The vestry has a duty to spend the church's funds wisely, so we did not take the financial outlay part lightly. The vestry supported the financial expenditure to renovate. As part of our efforts, we applied for a grant to help fund the project. We didn't get the grant. The application prompted me to put into writing the answer to this question:

*How will this project contribute to the growth, life and mission of the church?*

I'm going to share some of what I wrote in the grant application because I think it explains pretty well how stewardship of our space relates to St Peter's mission:

The lower level renovations will contribute to *increased capacity for ministry, hospitality and improved accessibility.*

Renovations will make the space more appealing to our current tenants which include a child psychologist, and a neighborhood nursery school which serves over eighty children and their families, and to the community groups like AA, NA, Storybook Theater Program for kids and the Boy Scouts, that share our spaces. This directly increases our capacity for hospitality to these groups and expands our community engagement.

Increased income will help our financial sustainability, and thereby increase St. Peter's ability to focus on our ministry and mission of sharing God's love and grace in

the name of Jesus both within the walls of our church and to our neighbors beyond. What that's saying is that we can have more money for ALL the good works we do within and outside these walls.

Further, by converting restrooms into more accessible single-use spaces and relabeling the rooms as gender-neutral and family-friendly, they will be more welcoming to all users of the lower level space.

Ultimately, when the space is fully accessible by ramps or stair lifts, or perhaps even an elevator, there will already be a restroom available for people who use wheelchairs, and the improved hallway flooring will allow for smoother, safer movement. This will allow not only our Rector, but members of the choir and volunteers in our Children and Youth programs to access the lower level and participate more fully in the life and ministry of our church and community. We hope it will also enable those who share our spaces to invite those with limited mobility to participate in their programs (i.e., the nursery school and

children's theater group). Additionally, our project plan for gender-neutral restrooms is in keeping with St. Peter's designation as a *Believe Out Loud* congregation. (As a *Believe Out Loud* Episcopal congregation, we welcome and affirm LGBTQ individuals as beloved children of God and full members of the Body of Christ.)

This project is ensuring that we at St. Peter's can flourish in our mission to serve Christ and His people in our parish and among our wider community by being Rooted in Love, Growing through God's Grace, and reaching out to all.

I want to call your attention to the narrative budget that Bob Hartung put together. I think the narrative does a wonderful job of answering a significant question about our budget: where does the money go? It shows that the our pledges support our mission through worship, education, the building and administration, pastoral care and fellowship.

It's no coincidence that our mission forms the image of a tree. My favorite tree on this earth, our island home.

I leave you with thoughts of stewardship and this Bahá'i prayer:

Blessed is the spot, and the house,

And the place, and the city,

And the heart, and the mountain

And the refuge, and the cave,

And the valley, and the land,

And the sea, and the island,

And the meadow where mention

Of God hath been made,

And His praise glorified.

Amen.

(Bahá'i prayer by Baha 'U'Lia'h)