

A Herd of Elephants, A Communion of Saints, A Widow's Mite

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you O Lord, my strength and my redeemer, AMEN.

The title of my homily this morning is “A Herd of Elephants, A Communion of Saints, and A Widow's Mite.”

Let me explain. I've sat in too many pews over the years where I felt that the sermon did not address the elephant in the room. Most notably, on the first Sunday after 9/11 when a Catholic priest at a small church on Maui failed to acknowledge in prayer or words, any aspect of the tragedy that had plunged our nation into shock and grief only five days before. Let's just say my handshake was what was most polite about our encounter after church.

Today, it feels like there's a herd of elephants with us in our sanctuary. Emily is leaving. The news, shocking and surprising, is a seismic change for St. Peter's at a time when most of us know we can't fathom bearing any more loss or change after the relentless upheaval and disruption the pandemic has caused in all our lives and the world around us even if we haven't had to bury someone close to us without a chance to say goodbye.

But now we are faced with a gigantic goodbye: the Holy Trinity of St. Peter's, Emily, Daniel, and Maggie, who made 13 a very lucky number for this

congregation because for 13 years, they gave and gave to all of us. Yes, lucky us, and we are so deeply grateful for all of you. And yet, this is still so very hard.

I am sure that within this congregation this week, just about every feeling there is to be felt has stampeded to the fore, like a herd of well, yes, elephants.

There have been moments when I felt more compassion toward Peter when Jesus started to talk about going into Jerusalem to be betrayed and Peter lost it. Goodbyes are hard, hard, hard, when there's a lot of love involved.

But I know from my training, experience, and my heart, that the only way over hard feelings is through and I hope each and every one of you has been honest about what you're feeling. We will get through this together because we at St. Peter's keep our compass pointed towards Jesus. That is why we are the parish we are today, and have been, for what will be 142 years this Christmas Day. Emily has been our sixth rector.

Think for a moment of the souls who have nurtured St. Peter's since it began. It's existed for 81,800 days, give or take a few. Think of this spectacular communion of saints, some known, but most unknown, who along with our St. Philip's saints have made us who we are. Think of the acolytes, the altar guild, the vestries, the wardens, the choirs, the clergy, the Tims and Pattys, the weddings, the baptisms, confirmation classes and funerals and all the parishioners who year after year walked into St. Peter's with their fears, their hopes, their dreams, their

wholeness their brokenness, and their faith in Jesus Christ, creator, redeemer and sustainer.

In a few moments we honor our past and pledge ourselves to the future in the sacrament of baptism. Brayden's links to St. Peter's are through his *great* grandparents, Don and Phyllis Kelley, who worshipped here for years. And six year-old Cece's ties are to her grandparents Janice and Dan Sollas. Apparently Cece has been *begging* to be baptized and what a joy it is to welcome her to our church family – and future-- today. We know whose grandparents *and* great grandparents are in the front row of that “great cloud of witnesses this morning.”

Yes, we are sailing into uncharted waters now and we will begin to chart a new course for St. Peter's and ourselves. But when it feels like it's too much, too sad, too hard, think of the saints, those saints who come marching in with us in spirit and communion who have loved and belonged to us-- as each and every one of us will one day belong to the past of St. Peter's, and not the present.

Life comes to us unbidden, when we were making other plans. Two years ago masks meant mostly Trick and Treating and Zoom meant something that raced right by. We have, and still are, traversing a place beyond imagining one saturated by death, loss and suffering. 750,000 of our fellow Americans are dead, which is about 300,000 more since last Thanksgiving. Death tolls are numbing, but the loss

of a loved one—by any cause— splits a person’s life into a before and after, and nothing is ever the same. When you really love someone death is always too soon.

Which is part of the beauty and sacredness of All Saints’ Day. We remember, and we reach out to those we love but no longer see. In his poem, “On the Death of the Beloved,” Irish poet John O’Donohue asks this of the saints:

**May you continue to inspire us:
To enter each day with a generous heart.
To serve the call of courage and love
Until we see your beautiful face again
In that land where there is no more separation,
Where all tears will be wiped from our mind,
And where we will never lose you again.**

And our faith promises us that day will come again, when after staring into the glass darkly, we one day do see face-to-face.

But until then, here we are, keeping our compass pointing to Jesus and doing the best that we can, which brings us to the widow’s mite, our gospel reading today, and brings me back to 9/11.

In the immediate aftermath of the disasters, St. Paul’s Chapel, where George Washington once worshipped, and was essentially in the front yard of the World Trade Center, was turned into a 24/7 relief center for weeks on end as rescue workers combed through the acres and tons of rubble.

One day, an elderly woman took the subway down from the Bronx. She came alone. She had a cane. She found someone who was part of the relief effort at

St. Paul's and said, "Here. Someone might need this more than me" and handed over her cane.

That was it. She turned and walked away maybe with a limp or an unsteady gait to get back on a subway, maybe two, to travel alone all the way up to the Bronx.

She gave all she had. A nameless saint if there ever was one.

And that's what we have to do now. Yes, Emily is leaving. This will be hard. It would only be easy if she hadn't given her all and meant so much to us.

Now for St. Peter's you and I must all give all that we have, and do all we can, to ensure that when we are all gone and forgotten, St. Peter's will be standing here on 654 North Easton Road, thriving and as our sign says:

*A community of people rooted in God's love,
growing through God's grace and reaching out to all.*

AMEN