

What St Peter's Means to Me

Good morning. I'm going to do my best to be brief, which is a bit of a challenge, first of all because it goes against my basic nature, and secondly because the way I feel about this place can really only be described as expansive. But here goes.

It's hard to believe that it's only about a decade I've been part of this community, especially when I look back at the sheer quantity of life you all have been supporting me through, and witness to. I walked in these doors with 2 small hands in mine, somewhere around 2011, looking for a place where my 4 and 6 year old could get some basic rudiments of Christian theology. I wasn't quite sure what I believed, but I definitely believed it's easier to figure out your own faith path if you have an opportunity to experience what it means to include faith in your life at all.

I don't think I realized it, on that day, but what I was yearning for was a place to belong. In which case, landing in what might be the most welcoming community I've ever met was certainly kismet. My family was welcomed, embraced, and invited to participate in every aspect. The noise of my squirming children directly behind her didn't bother Sue Wright at all, as long as we were careful not to take "her pew", and Jack Wilbur immediately branded Sam "Smiley", greeting her every time she twisted in her seat to grin at him.

We worked the pumpkin patch. The kids dove into anything Jess Miller needed a team for. They clambered onto the stage at the Talent Show and performed for a roomful of parishioners that thought nothing of giving a standing ovation to a 6 year old.

My husband was a man who only found God in community, so besides being dragged to Christmas and Easter, the place you would find him at this church was at the picnic, pitching for kickball.

I'm a little more introspective, more prone to watch from the edges, worrying that a lack of clarity can appear as insincerity. And here also, my church could meet me. Frank Toia stood in the pulpit and gave a sermon I'll never forget, admitting doubt that God exists, and trusting his community to love him as the man he was.

The years passed. As we all know, Man Plans, God Laughs, and I found myself expecting a baby 11 years after the previous. The joy of St Peters around this news was so genuine, as it was so clearly rooted in a love of welcoming, and a love of children. Kieran nursed to organ music once a week basically from his arrival. Deacon Pat performed the sending out with him in her arms.

My older two children I baptized in the Catholic church, years before finding this place. After a Sunday service, when the community had filtered out, my family and our extended family gathered around in a small circle and welcomed each of them, in a service that felt like congratulations on new life and welcome to our family.

Kieran's baptism could not have been more different. In a packed church on Pentecost, I learned how deeply significant a sacrament is when a community bears out the true meaning of the words. I always knew that Baptism meant welcoming a child into their community of faith, but

this was my first experience with celebrating something with my church where the celebration was ABOUT it being with my church. I felt buoyed on your love.

Not 10 months after that moment, you all carried me again. My husband Dan died, suddenly and unexpectedly, before Kieran reached his 13th month. In a packed church, as I counted no less than 11 people serving at his funeral, I realized that I belonged to you, every bit as much as you belonged to me.

It is a testament to my husband that it could take 400 people to make me feel as cocooned and safe as he did. It is a testament to this church that on that date, you could do that.

When I think of St Peters, the thing that I marvel at, that is so unique about this community, is the way it embodies scripture, taking words from a page and living them out, making them real. This is a cerebral community. I mean, you all really GET a metaphor. Seeing what it means to have Christ's teachings be really lived in mind, heart and body, it's a powerful thing. This group of thinkers shares words and ideas. This group of feelers laughs, wipes away tears, hugs through a sign of peace that is anything but peaceful. And when I think of embodied, I see a line of friends passing heavy pumpkins from a truck to the lawn, I see Melissa Olsen being handed communion to be brought to the homebound, I see a wooden mailbox carried from St Phillips into our parish hall, as we spend advent not just remembering to care for those outside our doors, but also to care for each other.

Am I anxious about our future? Sure. I've only ever known one way to be when worshipping here, and that's been under Emily's guidance. But as I saw all the familiar faces participating in her last service I realized with a shock that you all are my church, and the values that this community lives are woven into each life in a way that cannot be teased out, and those values will carry on as we continue to walk together. I just hope our new rector is ready for us.