

*2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/Proper 5 Year A*

*Lections: Hosea 5:15-6:6; Ps. 50:7-15; Rom. 4:13-25; Matt. 9:9-13, 18-26*

Oh, my friends, my heart is aflutter with a great mix of emotions right now. I am finding it hard to believe that I have been with you for 4 ½ months as your Bridge Priest and now it is time to say, if not exactly good-bye, then “See you later.”

Time does indeed seem to fly when you are having fun, and that’s what this tenure has been for me: 4 ½ months of fun, enjoyment, and more importantly, deep fulfillment which only comes from knowing I have been faithful to God’s calling, to walk alongside you, Grace Church in this liminal time. You are a beautiful, faithful, and loving part of the body of Christ and it has been an honor and a gracious gift to be your pastor for this short while, and part of me is sad at having to leave now.

To be honest, I was not expecting all that when I first contemplated joining you at the beginning of the year. You may not have known it, but I came to you a heartbroken and angry priest. Last autumn, I was informed that, despite the support of the bishops and other leaders, our diocese would not be awarding me the grant I needed to continue church-planting with fellow queer and trans people of color as a full-time position. At first, I was confused and disappointed at myself. How could this grant committee not have seen the need for this ministry? I must have failed in accurately communicating it somehow.

Then I grew anxious, particularly about my family’s finances. How were we going to make ends meet if I didn’t have a stable job? But church planting is hard work. Could I really balance “traditional” parish ministry in a post-COVID church with starting something new?

And then I turned over every stone I could. I talked to everyone I could talk to, up to and including our bishops, multiple times. And the same answer kept coming back: sorry, there’s nothing we can do, the decision is out of our hands. And that’s when the heartbreak set in. And the anger. Anger at an institution that, as I saw it, would support the full inclusion and celebration of queer and trans people of color, but only with their lips, not with their lives, and definitely not with their money. It was a bleak time in my life and in my vocation. And the question I turned to in almost every conversation with the people I trusted most: with my fiancé, Ben, my therapist and spiritual director, and my friends inside and outside the church, was: is the Episcopal Church still the right place for me? Is this really the church God wants me to serve?

And then, like when Matthew the tax collector saw Jesus walking by his collections booth, I stepped into this place, right when God knew I needed it. God knew I needed a community, not just of loving support, like many parishes would have been, but a place where strong, competent, and committed lay leaders, and a peerless staff, and so many open-hearted, self-giving people

could give me the time and space to sit with those hard questions about faith, life, and ministry that I was asking. You, Grace Church, were the fringes of Jesus's cloak that I needed to touch, for my own spiritual healing and emotional wholeness. And I was made well.

When I started as your Bridge Priest, I truly did not know if I was up to the task of pastoring a congregation—even part-time, even with a limited scope, even for a few months. But you taught me what I was capable of, even when I didn't always feel it to be true in myself. You brought back my love for parish ministry. And, you reminded me that the church, our Episcopal Church, is not just a diocese, not just bishops and canons and committees, but that the church, the body of Christ, is here, right here in these pews, gathered around this table, and sent out into the world to work for justice and to make peace.

You gave me hope, when I was hoping against hope, that support for ministering with queer and trans people of color and for exploring new ways of *being* church isn't only bishop-deep. You made me trust, once again, that God has intersected my path with this weird and beautiful and changing and beloved church for a reason. This hope and this trust didn't just reignite my love for parish ministry, it also reinvigorated my ministry with the new community I'm starting.

For all of this and so much more, from the bottom of my heart, thank you, beloved. I love you. And I will miss you.

And thanks be to God that They are faithful with Their promises and steadfast in Their love. I know it's a little far into this sermon to break open the Word, but I just can't resist one final time with you, my friends. Because that's what faith is—not an intellectual assent, not a rote recitation of creeds, but faith is a living, dynamic *trust* that God is a God of mercy and steadfast love. A God who keeps the promises They make. The people of Israel trusted God to remember them even in the face of foreign conquest. St. Paul reminds us that this trust goes all the way back to Abraham, and our faith, our trust, makes us heirs of the great patriarch as well. And our Gospel reminds us that Christ sees us especially when we feel furthest from God's love or when we are at our lowest points in our lives: physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually. Jesus promises to always see us, to love us, to heal us, and then, he calls us to follow him.

I know you have that trust, that faith, Grace Church. I wouldn't be the priest I am today without it. And it is your faith that God is able to do what They have promised that will keep you well and whole and following Jesus, not just for the next 7 weeks with Cara. Nor the weeks after that. Nor just for the tenure of your next Priest-in-Charge and your next wardens, and Vestry, and other leaders, but if you keep that faith, God will make you well for generations and generations to come. I will be watching and cheering from afar. Amen.