

**Annual Meeting
St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church,
Dahlonega, Georgia
January 17, 2010**

To begin with, it is difficult to say anything in the context of the devastation of Haiti and the suffering of her people. Let us begin here too in a moment of silence dedicating our common heart to those people and their recovery.

O God, our shield and armor of light, whom we adore with all the angelic host: Defend us from evil; watch over any who are in danger this day and give your angels charge over them; and grant that we may always rejoice in your heavenly protection and serve you bravely in the world; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

From St. Helena's Breviary

I am going to start where I hope always to start. On Thursday afternoon I was here, just outside that door with Tom, Bob, and a person who was here with them, helping them repair the concrete slab that the frost had raised up prohibiting the door from opening. The third person of that trinity of good deeds is not a member of St. Elizabeth's. But as I was leaving he took me aside and said, Albert, please when ever you are having a fund drive or are sending money to support a program let me know because the people of St. Elizabeth's has so much impact in this community and we want to be part of that impact, and will send our contributions through you.

So that is who we are and that is how we are known: You are the People who proclaim God's Word (not with empty expressions of piety, but through acts of charity), who celebrate God's love (not merely by coming together on Sunday to celebrate Holy Eucharist, but by living that love in

the world), who share God's gifts (I was contacted by people sitting here this week to see how we might best respond to Haiti).

Repeat after me: The mission of St. Elizabeth's Church is proclaiming God's Word, celebrating God's love, and sharing God's gifts.

Why is it? Why do we get this right?

I do not recall if it were Christmas Eve or a Sunday in Advent, but in any regard there were a fair number of people out in the nave here to worship. And I counted from the bulletin. More than 1/3 of the worshipping congregation had an active role in the leadership of our worship on that day, over 35 people: Greeters, ushers, crucifer, servers, acolytes, readers, chalicists, choir, choir director, altar guild, flower guild; I do not believe I counted the Bread Ministry or the VPOD; I do not believe I counted Robbie who prepares our bulletin every week, or Judy and Ginny, and Trish who edit it; all people who knew we are what we do, and did...and do. This list did not include LEV, those who were involved in Christian education, or any other ministry of the parish, such as DOK who form among us an intentional community of prayer, or Piece Makers who weave those beautiful bonds of love and warmth that have been sent throughout the world to people suffering for one reason or another; only that serve that day. And this is repeated every Sunday. And what forms us here, we take out into the world. We are what we eat, and we are the body of Christ in the world, and it is noticed. We were the water that has been changed into wine; we are the new that cannot be contained in the old skins lest they break.

Enormously grateful for this, I hold before us this day several challenges for the year before us.

- 1) The Memorial Garden: My hope is that after the Annual Vestry Work Weekend next week a concrete plan will be put before us, and this plan will be actualized before the end of the summer, maybe not completed, but a garden in place.
- 2) Sandy and Martin McCann: My hope is that two of us can go to Dodoma, Tanzania in April or May with Bishop and that this ministry will become part of our identity.
- 3) Ecology – Economy: My hope is that we will actively dedicate ourselves to healing the breach that exists between our ecology and our economy; that our Green Keepers under the leadership of Rosalie will be one of our principle chatternags, nagging us into a more durable future. My hope is in doing this that we can incorporate in some serious and doable manner the discipline of Sabbath Rest, a time in which we exempt ourselves spiritually and physically from active participation in a global economic culture that inevitably makes us complicit in all kinds of questionable ethical practices such as child labor, irresponsible disposal of our trash, the continued exploitation of the earth, contributing to the global warming, and on and on.
- 4) We continue to be at war. My hope is that we can more seriously and regularly bring these wars—our troops who suffer these wars, and the people of the countries in which these wars are engaged who endure these wars—into our hearts, our prayers, and that in these and others ways we can be active ministers of the Prince of Peace.

Needless to say, the stained glass window project should be completed sometime in February.

I am not going to name people this afternoon who work so diligently on making this place work in every way. I am going to repeat a theme that I raised in a homily last year: Vestry. Vestry or the Wardens are not positions to aspire to. They are positions of people who say, Yes, I will. I will meet once a month at 8:30AM prepared, and on other occasions as needed; I will give up a weekend to plan; I will make decisions prayerfully about the mission and ministry and shape and life of this community of faith. If you have not thanked your vestry recently, please do. It is not an easy job, and it is often thank less; let's change that.

In the name of God the Source of all Being, the Incarnate Word, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.