

This morning I am not going to really preach a sermon, rather I'm going to channel my inner St. Paul and write a letter to you, not nearly as eloquently as Paul writes, but hopefully without the run-on sentences, occasional misogyny, and wildly egocentric moments for which Paul has a penchant. And like Paul's letters, this is a love letter- a letter from someone who was once part of a community but who is moving on, and wants to just say a few more things to that beloved community upon leaving.

To all God's beloved at St. Peter's in Philadelphia, who are called to be saints. Grace to you and peace from God, through the Unique One, Jesus Christ.

When we first met 16 years ago, I was a priestling wearing a pristine white collar and a crisp new clergy shirt; confused as I tried to figure out which door to the church was the entrance. I had no idea really what I was walking into but St. Peter's seemed like a pretty good place- and I was right, because what I found here was you-a community of people with big hearts and a lot of curiosity-who are eager to learn and to deepen their faith, not afraid to ask questions or express doubts. People who are quick to welcome anyone who walks through the door and who both

acknowledge and are OK with the fact that every new person changes the community. I found a community that likes to laugh, enjoys each others' company. has a heart for social justice. loves to sing. I found a true community of faith that is a blessing to each other and to the world.

Over the last 16 years we have gone through much together. We have supported each other, hurt each other, confused each other, forgiven each other. We have made plans both big and small- some have come to fruition, some have not. We have seen many people come and go, welcoming them and sending them forth in the name of God. We have baptized dozens of babies who squealed as the water of life ran down their heads and the sign of the cross was made on their brow. We have watched dozens of couples begin their new lives together here as they celebrated the sacrament of marriage. We have come here to grieve the death of those we love- to mourn and celebrate their lives, and to return them to the fullness of God's embrace. In this place we have prayed, raised our voices in songs of joy and lament. We have painted classrooms in Guatemala and fed thousands of people from this building. We have weathered a pandemic, quickly learning the ins and outs of zoom and worshiping online. We have comforted each other after multiple national crises; gathering after mass

shootings, police shootings of unarmed black men, elections, supreme court decisions. We have raised our voices for Black Lives, against gun violence, against the injustice we see in the world around us and the injustice in which we participate. We have watched little girls in pink unicorn costumes twirling in the aisle during a hymn. We have hung pictures of slime molds and sloths, butterflies and bees on the walls and pews as we celebrated God in all of life. We have sung Silent Night and watched the Star of Bethlehem go wildly off course leading shepherds and angels on a loooooong meandering walk to the manger, and we have beheld a manger scene with a tiny cow planted in front of Baby Jesus eating pretzels while a T Rex casually leaned against the holy family. We have sung Were You There and watched 30 little hands reach up to carry the cross down the aisle. We have sung Jesus Christ is Risen Today and celebrated in true St. Peter's fashion by eating a lot of Federal Donuts-because, really, nothing says He is Risen like a donut. We have watched people too frail to walk alone help each other up the aisle to receive communion. We have nurtured each other to grow in faith and love. We have shared our lives.

And now, it is time for me to say goodbye- my part in the life of this community is done. Being with you-serving as Associate Rector then

Rector has been one of the great blessings of my life. And leaving you is hard.

And, as when anyone leaves this community, but especially when a Rector leaves, the community changes, and so it will now. But this community, you, will go on being who you are and doing what you do- praying, laughing, grieving, celebrating, eating, working together. You will go on seeking to live into the many gifts and talents that you possess and that the Spirit will continue to shower on you-individually and collectively. You will go on listening for the voice of God, listening for the opportunities that are always present when the Spirit hangs around and, then I pray, having the courage to seize them and live into God's next. You will go on seeking to be Christ's hands and heart in this place, this city. You will support each other. You will let each other down. You will find a way through it. You will baptize, marry, and bury. You will move to the rhythm of life lived in God. You will step into a future that you can plan for but which is unknown-except that God is in it. Always.

Remember *that*. Remember that God loves you- God loved you in the beginning, God walks with you always, and God will love you into eternity. Love God. Love each other. Care for each other. Be patient with each

other. Push each other to grow in discipleship. Be a force for justice-together-because when y'all work together you are a force to be reckoned with. Especially now, in the in-between time you are entering, support Sarah and the vestry. Keep coming to church. You need each other and the world needs you.

It has been one of the greatest blessings and privileges of my life to be with you over the last 16 years and I leave with a much grubbier collar than I started with, a wrinkly shirt, and a full heart. I love this church. I love you. And I leave you in good hands: in the hands of each other, in the hands of an incredibly wise vestry and in the hands of Sarah and Joe, truly gifted priests. And of course, in the hands of God who cradles and carries you always. I can't wait to see what you and the Spirit get up to next. Whatever it is, may the Grace of Jesus Christ be with you and fill you with all joy, courage, hope, and peace in believing.

Amen.