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St. Anne's Episcopal Church, Warsaw  
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 14)  
August 7, 2022

Lectionary Year C: Genesis 15:1-6; Luke 12:32-40

As the Church as a whole struggles along in changing times, many in the Church, including myself, are evaluating what ought to be changed and what ought not be changed. "Better late than never," one might think (on the bright side). Throughout the Episcopal Church, there is a pretty solid understanding of what makes us identifiably "Episcopalian" -- the Prayer Book and the way we do worship and so on. This I would count among the things we ought not change, and, if we do, it needs to be done carefully and thoughtfully. But then we get to things that might need some adjusting, if not a complete overhaul. That's where there's bound to be some pain, struggle, hurt feelings, and Lord only knows what else.

Our Gospel text greets us with a most comforting assurance from Jesus: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). I realize that fear is a powerful (and sometimes necessary) motivator, but whenever the subject of change is brought up, we find that change is one of the things that we fear the most. And yes, there is a comfort that all of us take in familiarity and routine, but if that which is familiar and routine doesn't work like it should anymore, we need to explore alternatives.

Keep Jesus' words in mind, though: "Do not be afraid, little flock..."

Our men's and women's organizations at St. Anne's -- SAMS and ECW, respectively -- discussed on Thursday evening the possibility of doing some things dif-

ferently in the future, including (but not limited to) the Annual Sale, formerly known as the Tent Sale. But before any changes are made, we will need to know what all of you are interested in doing and willing to do. First among our priorities, I believe, is retaining the robust tradition of outreach for which St. Anne's is known. Thus, we might ask ourselves, "What ways can we sustain a sense of community and common purpose while being the hands and feet of Jesus in Warsaw, Indiana?" And as we ask that question, we might also examine what would be the most effective, engaging, and realistic ways of doing that -- not only for ourselves but also for the community.

Our Lord gives us some timely advice in that regard; he says, "Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes and no moth destroys" (Luke 12:33b). In our context, this could be interpreted to mean "Do something that's sustainable and lasting." We might, then, find ways of building up the future of our leadership, or starting up something that won't disintegrate after a few key people have moved on or died. And as a secondary, but still noteworthy, consideration, think of the role of our witness in the community as it may be both the hands and feet of Jesus and something that might pique the interest of curious souls who wonder, "Who are the people of St. Anne's Episcopal Church and what are they all about?"

Perhaps a harder lesson to apply here is that of watchfulness. Jesus says, "Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks" (Luke 12:35-36). Being watchful as in being vigilant and on our guard can take on a number of meanings when we

apply this principle, but for the sake of today's message, I'd have to say that it means know your surroundings, Know your context. What do people need? And if you don't know, get the data.

And it's not like we have to go out and do all the research on our own. I serve on the board of directors of LiveWell Kosciusko, which is a community coalition that focuses on the five pillars of well being -- physical, financial, social, career/purpose, and community. Our coalition has actual data on the areas where people in Kosciusko County struggle the most, and I'm not going to give away the answers, but if you go to the LiveWell Kosciusko website, you can find out what they are and ask yourselves, "How can St. Anne's be a part of making this better?" Be watchful for the needs around us, and, if possible, get the data.

God really loves us and, as Jesus promises, destines us for the Kingdom, and God is surely not the mean, old, angry tyrant of Old Testament caricature. (I say "caricature" because caricature is not the truth!) Remember that it was the God of the Old Testament who, as we read in Genesis 15, said to Abram, "Do not be afraid...I am your shield; your reward shall be very great" (15:1b). You see, the historical evidence would show us that God repeatedly and consistently blesses his people with his faithfulness even when his people are unfaithful to him. And when God the Father sent God the Son, God's faithfulness to a fallen humanity is most perfectly revealed. God's fullest and truest expression of grace and forgiveness arrived in human form to a young couple in Nazareth and became known as the Savior of the world.

And before we get antsy about our future, let us remind ourselves that this is the good news in which we are rooted. God loves us and we want others to see

and know that love. As we go about living out this calling, be watchful and notice especially the new faces in our midst, and, if you're not too shy, invite them to be a part of our Kingdom-preparing, if you haven't done so already. This would also be a good time to recognize the work carried out on the Wednesday before last at the Community Soup Kitchen with the help of several people who are new (or new-ish) to St. Anne's...remembering, of course, how important it is to keep everyone engaged in our life together.

So is this an occasion for fear as we contemplate how we're going to be the church over the next decade or so? I don't think so. Many, many centuries ago, Jesus said, "Do not be afraid, little flock," and Jesus is still saying that today to us. As long as I have hope and strength and inspiration from God to do so, I'm going to remind you of that because, now, you know what to do. You have the duties and the needs on one hand, but you have the talents and the gifts on the other. And you don't need me to lead you through every little step along the way, because you have the God-given gifts to be St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Warsaw, Indiana for many, many years to come.

Before we even think about dying as a church, let us think about living. Sure, you can be afraid, anxious, nervous, and worried all the time...and probably not get yourself very far. But, guess what, the good news of Jesus Christ frees you from all that fear, anxiety, nervousness, and worry by showing you a world transformed by God's grace and peace. Today, Jesus calls us to be on the lookout for that transformed world and to bring little bits of that into our world. And God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, will show you how to do that.

The instructions will come to you as long as you are watchful... Amen.