



St. John's Episcopal Church

October 17, 2016

Dear Friends in Christ,

*“For all the saints, who from their labors rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest—Alleluia, Alleluia!”*

So begins one of the more cherished of hymns which we find sung on All Saints Day, a hymn which speaks to the struggles and triumphs of the lives of the Christian faithful. Perhaps this hymn is particularly poignant as we celebrate 125 years as St. John's Episcopal Church. We can look back at the history of our parish, thinking of the countless people who brought prayer, praise, joy, and sorrow to this holy place, seeking and finding the grace and mercy of the Living God at the altar and amongst each other. Times have changed, Larchmont has changed, but St. John's has steadfastly stood as a testament to the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this season of stewardship, it would be simple, perhaps even simplistic, to view giving to the church as a way of continuing our mission and ministry because that is what the good people of our church have done for 125 years and we hope to ensure that St. John's is just as strong and vital in 125 more years. Pragmatically, we often speak of stewardship in terms of the bottom line. We have a considerable budget, we look forward to hiring a curate in the spring, and we are blessed with an endowment of several million dollars. Through the stewardship of numerous vestries, we have been able to limit our drawing from the endowment at a rate of only four percent or less of our total budget. Wouldn't it be great to have our pledged income cover all of our expenses without having to touch the endowment? That's certainly a practical goal that I, as your rector, would like to see us achieve.

The thing is, though, that by placing our reasons for giving on the continuance of our church for many more decades or through the example of fiduciary responsibility, we often miss out on the most important thing: God.

Every moment, every breath, every opportunity we have is a gift from God. At our baptisms, we are marked as Christ's own forever, recognizing who we are and whose we are. Without God, we are nothing and have nothing. In a culture that values self-sufficiency, we often forget this. And yet, all belongs to God, and those things that we are given charge of – our wealth, our ingenuity, our perseverance in the face of an often chaotic world – those are the things which we are called to give back to God.

This is why we pledge. We give back to God because of what God has afforded to us, and we give back to God at St. John's because St. John's has been a place where we have, for the past 125 years, encountered God. Through the sacrament of the altar, in our fellowship and prayers, through the music which fills the building and the laughter of little voices returning from Sunday School, we gain a sense of the presence of the Incarnate God. Our very church, the stone and wood and glass, helps to tell the story of the God of history and if we listen in those quiet moments, we may hear the call of God to be at peace, to be forgiven, to rest assured of the love that knows no bounds.

Pray. Pray about what God is asking you to give. Because St. John's is more than a charity and more than a club, it is a reminder that God is here, God is good, and everything is going to be o.k. It is a place where our own lives can reflect the love of Christ through service to each other and through service to friends and strangers alike. Many have asked, what is an appropriate amount to give? The biblical standard is the tithe, which is ten percent of what you have. This may not be reasonable for some. But take the time to think about a number, a percentage, that reflects your faith and your relationship with God. Even break it down to a weekly basis, looking at what amount of money pledged to the church is a true offering, a sacrifice even, that speaks to your dedication to God through St. John's.

Enclosed you will find a pledge card. Fill it out after prayerful consideration, returning it to the church by November 6th when we will have our ingathering Sunday. Over the course of the next few weeks we will hear from parishioners about how St. John's has improved their lives or strengthened their relationship with God.

We are good people. God has made us that way. And for 125 years that's been true of the people of St. John's. We need each other. God is always just within reach, even when times are tough, and we can sing with joy the words from that same hymn:

*"And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong—Alleluia, Alleluia!"*

We are St. John's. At all times, good or bad, when the strife is fierce or peace reigns, we are brave of heart and strong of arm, for ourselves, for each other, for those we don't know, and especially for the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ.

Peace and blessings,

Fr. Joe Greene
Rector, St. John's Episcopal Church
Larchmont, New York