

Congregational Church of Hollis, NH
Rev. Bob Macfarlane, Interim Minister, Hollis, NH
Farewell Sermon, Sunday, August 17, 2014

“Sir, We Would See Jesus”

John 12: 20 – 22; Ephesians 4: 31 – 5:2

PRAYER before the Sermon

O Still Speaking, Still Listening God, help us we pray, to always be listening for your still small voice, that in the hearing, we may find direction for our lives, and vision for the future. In Jesus' name. Amen.

“Sir, We Would See Jesus”

Well, dear friends, the time has come.

I remember well, when I was a little child and it was time for bed, my father would often quote from Lewis Carroll's "Looking Glass:"

“The time has come,” the Walrus said, “to talk of many things:
Of shoes – and ships – and sealing wax –
Of cabbages – and kings.
And why the sea is boiling hot –
And whether pigs have wings.”

And with that, and a hug and a kiss, my brother and I were off to bed.

Yes, the time has come. We've talked of many things. Not so much of shoes and ships and sealing wax, or of cabbages and kings. But we have talked together at great length, about the ingredients of what makes a family care for one another; about how a church family takes care of its own; how we fill a need when we see it, even when no one has asked us to; how God calls us to be kind to one another, even as Christ is kind to each of us; and just last Sunday, how Jesus nudges us, in all things, in our time, our talent, and our treasure, to “err on the side of generosity.”

Yes these are all good words – generosity, hospitality, caring, appreciation, forgiveness, humor. These and so many more, are the hallmarks of a church which knows itself, and which reaches out beyond itself. So it was, that we learn that some of the disciples were at a festival and in worship, and some Greeks came to Philip asking, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” And so immediately Philip and Andrew took them to see Jesus. You see, it is always important for us to have an ear to be aware of the spiritual needs of those about us, and a heart willing to introduce them to the companionship of Jesus.

Recall how our Deacon just read from scripture of St. Paul's prayer that we “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” Yes, you have been all these things, and more, during the time Diana and I have been among you. How grateful we are. And we know that as we now relinquish the honor of being your Pastor, we shall remain friends across the miles, still fellow travelers along our journey of faith.

My, how the times of saying hello are now but a distant memory, and now the days have “dwindled down to a precious few.” The contingent of men and women who helped unload our small U-Haul truck last October, are thankfully returning tomorrow to pack it back up. In between, we have had gallons of coffee conversations all over town, in your homes, in hospital rooms, for breakfast at Denny’s and Joey’s, at the Parker Maple Barn, on Confirmation Retreat, in the Fellowship Hall, at numerous Supper Circles, even on the golf course, even while weeding and mulching on the Parsonage grounds, and of course in this very sanctuary.

Conversations about where you’ve been, about where you are at this very moment, about where you dream about going into your future. Conversations about readying your Parsonage and Church facilities, so that you could grow into a future that might go far beyond your wildest imagination. Conversations about a Capital Campaign soon into your settled pastor’s tenure. Conversations about what our children remind us of continually, that indeed, “Love Grows here.”

And we’ve learned a great deal together as Pastor and People: We’ve learned of how St. Andrew, Patron Saint of Scotland, was the very first disciple to recognize the face of Christ, and ran to tell his brother Simon Peter, that he might introduce him to Jesus. Let us also like St. Andrew, become EXUBERANT disciples, introducing our families and friends and neighbors to this Jesus as well.

We’ve learned much about the year 1730 when Peter Powers Pioneer arrived on the scene, and carved out of the wilderness, a community now known as Hollis, NH. And we’ve learned that in the year 1743, The Rev. Daniel Emerson was called to be your first Settled Pastor, serving an incredible 58 years, with none other than Peter Powers as Chair of the Settled Pastor Search Committee which brought him to Hollis. Dr. Squires and his Committee today follow in a very vital and historic way, the path paved by those earliest Pioneers, Peter and Daniel.

We’ve learned that a Scout is reverent, as we have honored a number of your sons as they attained Eagle Scout. We’ve learned that worship can be fun – witness your extraordinary Mardi Gras, Jazz worship, and Pancake Breakfast. And you have appreciated the faith commitment of so many - witness your wonderful Confirmation youth, your committed New Members, your commissioning of Alex Bartis as a missionary to Costa Rica through the National UCC Board of World Ministries.

Witness your hundreds of Boston Strong scarves for Marathoners, how you honored those who have come before us by spending moments on Memorial Day Sunday in your historic cemetery, and finally your overwhelming support throughout Charity Omatian’s seminary training, and her eventual Ordination in the United Church of Christ this coming Fall.

We’ve heard General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain’s words, that “In great deeds something abides.” And you’ve come to learn that the words of St. Paul are true, that “You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.”

And we have crammed all this into just ten MONTHS. Think what you might be able to accomplish in the next ten YEARS! Diana and I shall be watching with eager anticipation from the sidelines, expecting great things in ministry and mission from this fine family of God’s own people! For we have every confidence, that when a visitor or stranger crosses the threshold of this Sanctuary asking, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus,” that they will see him, in each of your faces, and deep within your hearts.

Many of you have heard me say more than once, that my favorite quote of all time, the words which have continued to inspire me more than any others, are the words from Thomas Jefferson, who had reason many times in his life to be driven to despair, not only personally but also in the affairs of state, but who found strength to continue. Jefferson said, **“I steer my bark with hope ahead, and fear astern.”**

Not unlike a later President who also used images of the sailor. John Kennedy, who knew the sea well, reminds us that “a ship in port is safe, but that’s not what ships are built for.” So I say lovingly to you, our ship of faith must not rest in port, but must be tested upon the deeper waters of ministry and mission, for which you are now ready.

So it is, that as we come very close to reaching the shore of our journey across this Interim sea, we have discovered together that even while the sea may sometimes rage below us, and the wind be swirling about our heads, nevertheless, GOD IS IN CONTROL, God still speaks a word of comfort and of challenge, and Christ remains our Shepherd – with a faith as strong as an oaken staff!

Yes, the time has come. And yes, it is indeed, “a long, long while from May to December, But the days grow short when you reach September.” The time has come to give each other bear hugs and a holy kiss, to offer each other a word of encouragement, as each of us - each of you, and Diana and me both - as each of us steps into, not an uncertain future, but rather a future full of opportunity and discovery and hope.

It is a future for which you have worked hard, a future into which you walk with the Holy One at your side, a future we are pleased to have helped you discover. For remember St. Paul’s words of wisdom, “You CAN do ALL things through Christ who strengthens each and every one of you.”

Oh, the days do indeed dwindle down to a precious few,
September, November,
And these few precious days Diana and I have spent with you,
These precious days we’ve spent with you.

And YES....YOU ARE READY! You are ready, God willing, for your next adventure! Amen.

Heartfelt Thanks
From Rev. Bob & Diana Macfarlane

We knew that when we said “Hello” to you last October, we would be saying “Farewell” within the year. While it is always exciting to enter into a new relationship, it has never been easy for us to say good-bye. And yet that is the nature of Interim Ministry. We thank each and every one of you for the warmth of your welcome, the depth of your love, and the opportunities we’ve had together to imagine your new future.

We want to express our appreciation for the marvelous send-off we experienced on our final Sunday with you. Your kind words, the shower of cards, the delightfully fun collation outdoors on the lawn, the yummy cake, the generous greetings and hugs. And the gift of the bagpiper (with thanks to Therry Neilson-Steinhardt) was over the top, as we were “piped out of the Sanctuary!”

God’s love binds us together as friends across the miles. And while we will no longer be your Pastor, we shall always continue to be friends. Our next Interim Assignment is with the Mashpee Congregational Church on Cape Cod, a 45 minute drive from where we live. We shall be at our retirement cottage at 54 Pipers Way, Carver, MA 02330. Drop in and say hello on your way to the Cape!

Fondly,
Rev. Bob & Diana

INTRODUCTION to MORNING PRAYER

Flowers this morning are given by Debbe Shipman in honor of the birthdays of friends Ann and Joan. Flowers are also given by the family of Betty Rudinsky in her memory.

Please also note the recent deaths of Priscilla Moody and Marian Warren. Marian's Funeral will be held this coming Wednesday, with your new Bridge Interim, Rev. Bonnie Stagg officiating.

Over the last few weeks, I have tried as best I could, to visit with most of your homebound and nursing home people. I have sat with Bud King & Len Boucher at the Veterans Home in Tilton, Helen Robinson at Aynsley Place, Judy Roman & Martha Spaulding at Courville, Bob Gould at Laurel Place, and Jean Burns at The Inn, Paul Fimbel, Lydia Schellenberg and Betty Gondola, Frank & Eleanor Whittemore.

I want to tell you a brief story about Bob Gould. He's 99 living at Laurel Place in Hudson, and he'll be 100 in November. He reminisced with me about his very early days in Hollis, having been born at his home here – a true native! He's a man who needs to be interviewed and taped for posterity, by the Hollis Historical Society. Bob Gould tells me he remembers meeting Frank Whittemore when Frank was only five years old!

And finally, no one has been immune to the death this past week of Robin Williams. The sadness of his suicide, has brought to the forefront, a renewed conversation about the world of those who suffer from severe depression. Let us now spend a few moments in silence, as we speak our own words to a listening God.

MORNING PRAYER - Aug. 17, 2014

Loving and eternal God, we know that nothing can separate us from your love, that nothing can separate us from the companionship of Jesus, and nothing can separate us from the friendship we have grown to enjoy in these Interim days. We ask your blessing upon what we have accomplished, we ask your forgiveness for what we may have left undone, and we ask your benediction upon each and every one of us as we all walk into our new and unknown futures. Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts.

I pray, O God, for this congregation in Hollis, that it may move by your grace, from strength to strength, that it might continue to be a beacon of light marking the path along the shoals of people's lives. May the vision of pioneers Peter and Daniel be the continuing vision of the church today and into its future – a vision of welcome and mission, inclusion and hospitality, ministry and learning.

Hear our prayers for all who find themselves in tough places, that the rough places may be made smooth, and that they may be led toward God's goodness and grace. May those who need encouragement and healing, find it in Your words of hope and peace, and may those who mourn, especially the families of Robin, of Dan and Mona, of Betty, Priscilla and Marian, may they find in their grief, comforting consolation and peace.

For all this we pray in the name of Jesus, the Holy One, whose Way leads to lasting and eternal peace. Amen.