

**Emmanuel Episcopal Church
Vicar's Address, Annual Meeting, 31 January 2021
Rev. Kelly Sundberg Seaman**

In my message in Friday's e-news, there was one word bolded: **Connect**.

I wrote:

God is faithful. God is with us. "God, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine."*

And here—I'll offer—is the call that's ours in this particular moment: To give "glory to God from **generation to generation in the Church**, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever."* (*Ephesians 3:20,21, as used in Morning Prayer, BCP p. 102)

At the start of 2021: What's ahead of us, as the church?

Earlier this morning in worship, we heard, from the first letter to the Corinthians, instructions for a community of Christ-followers about making choices, not that favor themselves, but that instead look out others. And in particular, that look out for those who faith is new, or fragile, or still forming. That is the standard that is to guide choices as a Christian community: not our favorite things, and not our most familiar practices... but the way that most welcomes, that most invites, that most lowers the threshold for the newest in faith.

Covid has made for a difficult season, over the past year, and will still for months to come: and it has exposed and accelerated change—and the need for change. It has made us aware of transformations already happening or poised to happen.

When the virus subsides enough for groups, like our faith community, to meet in person, the temptation will be to simply return, and turn back inwards. That's a temptation to be resisted. As we return, we return, we are called to keep turning ourselves inside out. To keep our eyes on the whole kingdom. This is not about us, but about the rest.

For the past three years, you've heard me say, certainly more often than any of us could count, this phrase from the Letter to the Ephesians: "God, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine."

What have I meant? Quite simply, God's vision is beyond ours. Our wildest dreams of joy, peace, community, love, of all good things: they are and will always be less than the relationship and situation God would draw us into. We work and imagine constrained by human limits, always short of the unlimitedness of God. We strive, and God will still bless and surprise.

But we are called now, as Emmanuel Episcopal Church, to tend to the rest of that phrase from Ephesians. Those are words that connect us to those before and after us, and to the community that is the Church in the widest sense of that word, the Church that is God's people called out and called together, from generation to generation, to give glory to God. A faith that was given to us by our forebears in faith, and that's yours, mine, ours, to hand on.

Hand on to whom, then? The next generation, whether they are younger in age than you, or simply younger in faith. We nurture the faith we have, specifically to be able to share it.

We are poised to do this.

Our home in Ashland puts us directly across the street from an elementary school: How can we be good neighbors, to those kids, to every generation of their families who love them, and to their teachers and all the other adults who support them?

Our worship on the campus of the Holderness School put us literally in the midst of hundreds of young people, some of faith, most of none, all growing up in a world where big question and big dreams, and great fears and anxieties surround them. Can we shine with the faith that steadies us, pray for them steadily, be with them, and their teachers and mentors and their own families... conscious of the fact that every one of them is by choice at a school and in a community that anchors its identity and ethos in the Episcopal Church... that is, with us.

Our home in Plymouth, where so many paths cross: the diversity of people and events that PSU brings together, the regional high school, the hospital, multiple social services agencies, and gathering places, from coffee shops to the Common: we remain present in Plymouth, ready to engage with the world.

And we are called to engage with the lively concerns of our time and place: as New Hampshire Episcopalians, we have made commitments to the care of creation. And at convention last November, in addition to the resolution that made us "Emmanuel," the diocese's Resolution #2 committed us all to encountering and engaging with racial reconciliation in our local context.

For us, in this place, that could look like going deeper into the story of Jane Browne Livermore, daughter of the rector of the colonial-era parish that's now St. John's, Portsmouth. I've often spoke of her as our forbear in faith, coming to what's now Holderness with her Book of Common Prayer in her hand. But her father the Anglican priest owned at least one enslaved person, and the land she and her husband lived on is the ancestral land of the Abenaki people. That, too, is a story of "generation to generation in the church."

Faith was a gift to us, and even as it keeps us, it not ours to merely keep.

Let your light so shine...from your generation, to another generation. **Connect.**

As we read in Matthew 5, from The Message:

“Here’s another way to put it: You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.”

Glory to God from **generation to generation in the Church**, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.