



smyrna, Tennessee

St. Patrick's

Anglican Church

An Ancient Faith for Modern Times

Letters from the Wilderness

#1

Dear Saints,

A UPS truck pulled up in front of my house this week. When I went out to meet the driver he said with a large smile, *"They can kick you out of your church but they can't kick you out of your house."* As he handed me a package addressed to St. Patrick's he shook my hand and said, *"God bless you, y'all have done the right thing."* This has been the consistent response I have received through phone calls, emails and personal contacts, most of which has been from the greater Body of Christ. We sowed some tears but we are already reaping some joy through the encouragement of other Christians.

Beth had a great observation about our last Mass in our building. She said it was like graduation day. Sadness over things that will never be again but joy over the sense of expectation about

the future. I think that is a perfect way to look at it. We did suffer a loss and it is okay to be sad about that. But at the same time the future is before us and since we are journeying together in the wilderness we have much to which to look forward. Jesus said that we can consider ourselves "Blessed" which means "Happy" when we have suffered loss for the sake of the Gospel. So there is no reason why this cannot be a season of joy and excitement and expectation as we follow where the Lord leads us. I plan on enjoying this adventure and I hope you will join me in doing so. Just the fact that so many of us have chosen to do this together already makes this a cause for celebration. I would like to make some observations as we start this exodus.

1. As the UPS man said, "*y'all did the right thing.*" - We knew the night we voted to leave The Episcopal Church that it could mean the loss of our facilities. Although we had been told by the Standing Committee that they would work with us and that we were good until the end of January, all this changed with a phone call. St. Patrick's had requested a one year's lease but it was denied. Then the Diocese approved retired Bishop Herlong to take over our key services, including the Midnight Mass. Further they were going to tell us when we could and could not use the building, while *we* paid all of the bills, so we had no real choice. It would have been both unbiblical and a waste of resources to engage in lengthy legal battles, so we decided to take the high road and leave. As I have been told over and over again by Christians

of all stripes, *"y'all did the right thing."* Your courage and willingness to pay whatever price you had to pay to be true to the Gospel has inspired many both within and outside of our Communion

2. It is important that we engage in rumor control. – Rumors already abound and the Bible tells us that rumors are evil because they separate friends. One was that All Saints' had not paid the mortgage since the summer. I stopped that one by attaining copies of our payments and sending them to the powers that be. Another is that members of All Saints' cannot speak with members of St. Patrick's without going through a lawyer. That too is untruthful. Following a phone call from the Diocese that was verbally abusive enough for me to hang up on the caller, we realized that there were too many emotions on all sides. Thus we decided it would be best for St. Patrick's and the Diocese to wrap up our business with one another through lawyers who are working as volunteers. But that is *only* about business matters. Of course members can talk with one another and we should because we are not enemies, rather we have chosen to walk in a different direction. Rumors are not a part of the Kingdom so please nip them in the bud and do not pass them on.
3. Be flexible and be united – All of us are going to miss certain things. It may be the Children's Mass or the painting over the altar, or the sound of the music in the nave. I certainly have

my list. No one likes change but when you are in the wilderness you either change and adapt or you perish. The Israelites made everything portable so when God led them with a cloud by day or with fire by night they could pick up and follow. They had to be flexible and they had to stay together and so must we. Things are going to be very different but not the things that matter the most. All but a handful have formed St. Patrick's so it will be the same people. We also have the same Lord, the same Gospel and the same Sacraments. Christians over the centuries have held on to the apostolic faith sometimes in spite of their surroundings. They worshipped in catacombs in Rome and in secret house meetings in China and on the back of jeeps during wartime. None of it was ideal but we are here today because they were faithful in their generation and by God's grace others will follow us because we were faithful in our generation. We need one another right now and that is why we need to stay unified and be flexible. The bad news is that things in the wilderness are not like it was in Egypt and the good news is that things in the wilderness or not like it was in Egypt.

4. Look forward and rejoice - This last week has been one of emotional exhaustion and spiritual renewal. St. Paul speaks of forgetting what lies behind and pressing forward and that is what St. Patrick's needs in this wilderness. Looking back and second guessing serve no purpose. Looking forward with joyful expectation keeps us moving in the right direction.

When I first planted All Saints' I invited those first few folks to join me in a simple prayer, "*Surprise us Lord.*" The purpose of the prayer is not to impose our will on God but to ask for His will to be done, even an especially if it surprises us. I call on all of us to return to that simple prayer and then celebrate when we see the Lord doing just that. We may be in the wilderness but that is just fine because we are in the wilderness with one another and with the Lord and so there is no other place I would rather be. God bless you saints of St. Patrick's.

Fr. Ray +