

As we gather early in a New Year, we pause and look back at the Old Year just past. My task this morning, as at every annual meeting, is to share my sense of where Trinity is at this moment in time, what the canons describe as the “State of the Cure.” I’ll do so with words and, because they say “a picture’s worth a thousand words,” with some pictures too.¹ The thing is, my perspective is just one person’s perspective. So before I’m done this morning, I want to open up some space for your sense of where Trinity is, as well.

It’s been a political year at Trinity. That hasn’t been my intent nor, truth be told, is it a very comfortable place for me to be. I am, by disposition, as conflict-avoidant as the next priest. But as a priest and preacher and teacher, it’s near the very heart of my calling to wrestle with questions of how our inherited faith connects with, and speaks to, our modern world.

But it’s not just me as a priest, the same is true for any of us and for all of us. We share a burden of putting our faith into practice, but that doesn’t mean we’ll always agree. So I have been careful to remind us to be careful not to settle for partisan politics. And I will always strive to make sure we, following the promise we make in our baptismal covenant, “respect the dignity of every human being.” That respect must include respect for those on the other side of whatever political side any of us find ourselves.

And yet that same baptismal covenant – which has been a part of our tradition for 40 years now – is also full of reminders that the faith we share shapes our values and must express itself. Nowhere does that reminder come more sharply than in some of the readings that were read earlier in church today from Micah and the Beatitudes from Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount.”

In response to gun violence in our nation and the armed takeover of one of a local wildlife refuge and the increasing vitriol in society at large, I have made the largely symbolic (though not unimportant) declaration that Trinity is a “weapons-free” space. And, yes, I have joined with others, including Bishops United Against Gun Violence, in making this concern more public. It all seems in keeping with Jesus’ declaration: “Blessed are peacemakers ...”

And I have stood with others this past year, standing in solidarity with Native Americans (and their concern for the sacred earth) and with modern-day immigrants in the midst of their fears. Last week, I joined with others who participated locally in the Women’s March. Though I understand the implications of its timing, I did not see it so much a protest *against* the new administration as a celebration of a shared resolve to support all God’s children – including women, members of the LGBTQ community, and any others who are fearful. Again, I think of Jesus’ words, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness ...” And I am reminded of the words from Micah we also heard this morning.

¹ The “text” of my report doesn’t tell the whole story. For a glimpse of the images used, please look for the video taped at the meeting. As it becomes available, it will be added to our YouTube station (with a link provided on the church website).

And yet, for all that, it's not all that has preoccupied me – or the rest of us - in the past year. There have been so many wonderful celebrations of our communal life. From time to time, I repeat the old McDonald's ad campaign, "Food, folks, and fun." The words don't fully define us, but they're still a pretty good idea – and they do describe some things vital to us.

Of course, it's not just fun and games at Trinity. We are all involved in a more serious journey of faith. We gather to worship the God of our creation, the source of all goodness and light. We gather week by week and through all the seasons of the year. We have celebrated some of the happiest days of people's lives and some of the most trying times as well.

And we have been reminded, from time to time this past year, that we are part of a bigger church. Sometimes we have had to travel great distances – at least as far as Cove, Oregon – to participate in that larger reality. Sometimes the larger church has come to us.

And through it all, there's the work we do. It takes so many of you to keep the place pulled and put together. Of late, I cannot help but think of the volunteers who have spent so many hours, and expended so much effort, to keep shoveling and clearing the snow. And though it's hard to remember now, I also think of warmer days that have utilized the time and efforts of other volunteers doing other work.

Although many of our buildings are rebuilt and seemingly new, there's still been work to do on them and around them. And we are all indebted to those who take on the work and/or who oversee its getting done. I think, too, of our staff. I think of our Vestry. And I think of the committees and teams and work parties – you who give of yourselves to do the work of the church: welcoming the stranger in our midst; "proclaim[ing] by word and example the Good News of God in Christ."

Well, that's one way of reminding you of the range of our parish life. It's one way to remind you of the many, many people engaged in the life and ministry and witness and mission of this community of faith. Even so, I would be remiss if I didn't invite more of you to take a more active part in the same. There is more we could do, if and only if we decide we really want to. We could host monthly movie nights. We could open an emergency warming shelter for men. We could enhance the use of our facilities. But if we're going to do any of these things – or any others – we'll need someone to "own" them.

I grouped the photos in my slideshow according to the themes of my prepared remarks. It's a bit arbitrary to segregate them this way. And it's a bit misleading. We're not – either as individuals or as a community of faith – divided into categories. We're not just some of the things we do. We are, each of us, multifaceted and, all of us, part of one another and of all of these kaleidoscopic facets of the life that is Trinity Episcopal Church, in Bend, Oregon.

And yet, for all that, it's just one perspective. It's just my sense of who we are in this moment in time. Which means it's inevitably still only partial. You can help me broaden the perspective.

[Participants at the meeting were asked to recall one of the photographs presented during my remarks. A conversation followed, first one-on-one, then in small groups, followed by a plenary discussion.]

Well, that was all a bit of an experiment. I didn't know what to expect. I don't know what we'll do with it – or if there's anything we need to do with it. At the very least, I wanted to invite you to join with me as we assess the "State of the Cure" this year.

Whatever the benefit of this particular shared experience, I do know that it's not enough for us to indulge in a trip down memory lane. We need to draw on who we are and where we've been and what we've done ... and carry all that with us as we ask questions about who we'll become and where we're going and what we'll do next.

And whatever else, as Michael Curry keeps reminding us, we should always remember that we, at Trinity, are "the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement" here in central Oregon.