



ST. DAVID'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
3916 SW 17TH STREET
TOPEKA, KS 66604

"Living into a Spirit of Gratitude"

Rector's Annual Address 2010
The Reverend Donald F. Davidson

This isn't about me, this is about you. So often we hear that statement the other way around but not so today. This address is not about me, this is about you. We begin with the thanks where they ought to be, with the people of St. David's Church. With each of you and with all of you, from the oldest to the youngest and from the newest to the eldest, I thank you. We could not be where we are today without God's help and without you.

Rector's dream of congregations like St. David's; about people who are willing to give of themselves in ways beyond whatever could be expected. So I begin today where I began six years ago with you at my side, and where we stood and began together three years and three months ago. Thank you all.

Sometimes people in leadership positions forget the joys of working with others and we become slightly more passionate than is appropriate for the moments involved. This year I spent a number of moments apologizing for my own lack of tact at times and with great sincerity I appreciate your understanding. For those of you who do not know what I am talking about I have a video which may help you to understand.

"Terry Tate Video"

I love quizzes so I have one for you today. There is a four letter word that I will not utter during this address. A word I have used the last three years but not today. I have a prize for the first one that can correctly identify the word to the Senior Warden after today's service.

We have a lot of good news to share today as we meet for the 2010 Annual Meeting. I hope all of you stay for the meeting to hear the details and I assure you I have no intent to take away the joy of others in relating these things to you, yet here are the headlines:

- We are financially sound, possibly more so than ever before.
- We grew in membership.
- More households pledged for 2010 than in 2009.

This is simply excellent. All of this is because of the good people of St. David's and their amazing generosity.

So our mission for 2010 is "Learning to live into a Spirit of Gratitude."

An old credit card commercial for Master Charge (before it became Master Card) said "Now that you've got it, use it wisely."

Now that we have a new facility that is truly spectacular, we need to use it wisely. We need to send our thank you notes to the community by deeds of welcome and hospitality. Right now, Miqra is here, there are young people everywhere and I am thrilled about that. They are not the future of our church, they are the church today and they are welcome here.

This week Interfaith of Topeka will meet in our building, and I look forward to welcome people of other faith traditions to a place where they are truly welcome.

AA and Alanon will be returning to our building soon, and I have no doubt we will begin to do what our Bishop called us to do "wear it out."

We must never forget the way in which our community responded to us when we needed them, and we now have been given a great gift. To whom much is given much is expected.

What does it mean to be satisfied with normal? This is a serious question as it presupposes a painful idea that some would be satisfied with normal. The church cannot. The Holy Spirit is not continues to move and push and pull as make us as uncomfortable as all get out. The church is not at rest, the Victory has not been won, evil is still alive and well and the work is still waiting. The church is always about the business of tearing down and building up, there is no standing still; because standing still is to shrink back and retreat.

It takes a level of adult and faithful maturity to face the needs of a church in transition, and as I just stated a church is always in transition. Adult maturity sounds easy at first blush until the change means something important to you.

Are we willing to sacrifice space in our building used infrequently for a purpose or program that could do work every day?

Vision Controls our Perception and Perception Controls our Reality

We here at St. David's will be watched in our response to the community that came with open arms to us. We need to be careful that our memories are not bigger than our dreams; that our best days are in the past instead of looking with creativity at what needs to be done, could be done, must be done to make Christ's love for all people come alive.

We must learn to live into a Spirit of Gratitude.

We have a great need in this parish for servant leadership and for an understanding of what it means to be the heart and hands of Christ in this world.

In a meeting with our Vestry the Bishop said candidly that we must do a better job (speaking to all Episcopalians) in letting people know that there needs to be a sense of accountability for church membership, no this is not about rewriting the canons, it is more about taking scripture and making it a primary in goals and objectives:

This is basically what our Bishop said:

- a) People should attend church. If you show-up only when there is nothing else to do, or only when you or your children have something to do... you are missing the point. If you only see the church when it is decorated with lilies or poinsettias you are missing the point.
- b) Everyone should do something. It might be praying daily and it might be shoveling the snow. We have areas where we need your help, and we need leadership. There are many times when an event does not take place not because we do not have the funds or because we do not have the interest but because we do not have the leadership.
- c) Everyone should give. Pledging and moving toward the tithe should be the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual reality of being a part of a faith community. I use a modified definition of a sacrament on purpose because it is sacramental in a way. We give because we have been given so much and we recognize that giving back is a response, a thank you to God for what God has given us.

Through the years we have complained about the growth of evangelical and fundamentalist churches. They have grown with amazing speed and we wonder why they have all that success. Some have said aloud "what are they doing that we should be doing?"

To some degree this is the "Wall Mart" syndrome. Wall Mart moves into a community and little by little the small business closes as their customers go away.

The large evangelical church opens up with lots of money from national and political sources and sadly this creates empty pews in the smaller family and mostly mainline churches.

Have we created more Christians, no—or at least not many. Most of the time these small churches return large endowments and savings equal to the money spent by the larger evangelical churches to their denominations when they end up closing.

We need to recognize there are still about 50% of the people of this and every community who do not identify themselves as members of any church, and many who do not identify themselves with a specific faith group or religion.

We need to remember that if a person walks in our door, they are beyond interested and their first impression can make the difference to a lifelong relationship with this parish. Remembering my first line... this is not about me, this is about you. We all must welcome, we all must inform, we all must be the host and hostess with the mostest and we know it.

We also need to recognize that there are many folks who know the liturgy, may even know church history, theology and scripture but have yet to meet Jesus and experience what it means to live out the faith within them.

Adult formation, the catechuminate and regular opportunities for learning such as EFM should be a part of the response of the Christian who wishes to grow and learn and become more conversant about their faith and what they believe. This is not indoctrination or memorization or some such thing, it is about coming to terms with what you believe within the broad diversity of Anglicanism. This too is a response, a living into the spirit of gratitude.

We have a lot to do.

The work has just begun.

We have the most amazing people in the world, and we have the ability to do anything that we want to do.

We have been lifted up by others and it is now our time to do the lifting.

We have been saved from the depths and we have arisen from the ashes and given the devil a swift and effective kick.

Ours is a future that is filled with sunshine and light because we have seen the darkness and do not wish to be there again.

So come with me, learn with me, grow with me in the year ahead and set your sights and the sights of those who are new to this community to responding to God's love by loving, responding to God's grace by forgiving, responding to God's presence with open doors and learning day by day to live into a spirit of gratitude for all God has given us.

Amen