

Anne's Installation as Rector
 Wednesday, Feb. 6, 2013
 Christ Church, Clarksburg, W.Va.
 The Rev. Scott West

Jeremiah 1:4-10
 I Corinthians 13:1-13
 Luke 4:21-30

Christ Church's Next Chapter

“And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

On Thursday [June 25, 1834] I reached Clarksburg, which is in the heart of western Virginia. There I spent three days, preached five times, baptized one adult and twelve children, confirmed five persons, and administered the communion. The people of Clarksburg and Morgantown expressed a strong desire to have a minister sent to them, and I was truly happy to be able to gratify their request in a manner well calculated to the interests of religion and the church in that region. The Rev. Mr. Ward, who was ordained in Alexandria in July last, went to Clarksburg in the fall, and has since been faithfully and acceptably labouring in those two places.”¹

Thus the Rt. Rev. William Meade reported aloud in his assistant bishop's report to the Diocese of Virginia in convention in Lynchburg on May 20, 1835. And thus began this parish's first chapter of a permanent priest assigned to Clarksburg. Bishop Meade went on to state that Mr. Ward had begun regular services both in Clarksburg and Morgantown.

With missionary endeavors began in the 1820s by faithful clergy from the Valley of Virginia and through the appointment of the Rev. Mr. Ward, the Episcopal Church had permanently arrived in Harrison County. Tonight, almost 179 years since Bishop Meade's address, we gather to celebrate the calling of Christ Church and St. Barnabas' new rector, the Rev. Anne Kersting West. Another chapter of this parish's history begins this night.

The lessons seem particularly appropriate for our liturgy, given the rare instance of a priest being called to her home parish. While I would never want to equate Anne with Jesus, as we heard in the Gospel lesson, there are a few parallels about expectations and the ability to hear and be heard. Also we have heard St. Paul's eloquent words to the church in Corinth on the topic of love. Jeremiah has given us a sense of what it means to be prophetic.

The prophet speaks beautifully about God knowing him before he was formed in the womb. And before he was born, he was consecrated and appointed as a prophet to the nations, to the Gentiles. Think about that for a moment; the awe of that statement, that before Jeremiah, or you, or me were formed in our mother's wombs, God knew us and consecrated us for His work in

¹ The Rt. Rev. William Meade, Assistant Bishop's Report for 1834. *Journals of the Conventions of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Virginia, from 1785 – 1835, inclusive.*, p. 317.

this world. Little did Anne know as a child sitting with her parents and siblings in her Easter dress, hat, and gloves that someday she would stand at this communion table and read these nearly ancient prayers, sharing God's grace in bread and wine with you. But God knew. Little did Anne know as she worked with the youth of this parish and taught school for her living, that one day she would be the priest here, working with the youth, and the elderly, and middle aged, and the children - all. But God knew. Little did she and I know when we stood here to exchange our vows with the Rev. Tom Seitz and Bishop John Smith, that she would stand here and officiate at weddings, and funerals, Boy Scout awards, and Sunday Eucharists. But God knew. So it is with each one of us, as we go about our day to day routine, doing the things that make us ourselves, serving God in our own ways, sometimes surprised as to where we have come, never expecting this to be the destination. But God knew.

We come to St. Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, and we have heard these familiar words again. This is where our lessons get a bit instructive for Anne and for you her parish family. She could easily stand here before you Sunday after Sunday, speaking in the tongue of a mortal (sorry Annie, no angels wings here), and if she does not have love for you, she's a noisy gong and clanging cymbal. Likewise, for you as parishioners if you do not have love for Anne and for one another, you're just as noisy, because Christian community is built on love, for one another, for the common good, for the spread of the Kingdom of God, for the love of Jesus Christ. It's not built on selfish need or desire, the want of power or control, or ego or self-importance. Though flawed and fragile as any human institution, the church lives with love for one another inside and outside of these old walls. And believe me, God knows when we've failed to love as we should! And we do too! So with love for one another, we bear all things in love, that same love believes all things, and it hopes all things, and most of all it endures all things, because LOVE NEVER ENDS. Being in Christian community, the church, we continually need to remember that love is patient, kind, not envious, or boastful, or arrogant or rude. When we love, we do not insist on our own way, because love is not irritable or resentful. Now the reality check, we too are only human, known by God before our creation, and so we will get frustrated with one another, at the least. Our imperfections will surely be made known! And the remedy for that is LOVE, allowing ourselves to love one another and to be loved in return. Love God, love one another, love the people whom God has known before their very forming and sent them to this place to be a part of something this wonderful, known as Christ Church.

Now, about this business of a prophet not being welcome in his hometown, as Luke's Gospel puts it. Anne's rectorship is quite rare, to serve the church in which one has been reared and raised up for ministry, is a testimony to you, the Christ Church's vestry and to Bishop Klusmeyer for believing that this hometown woman can serve this parish with the prophetic voice of Jeremiah, the love of God described by St. Paul, and with the commitment to Jesus Christ.

Our Gospel lesson presents problems often encountered by those returning to familiar surroundings and familiar people to accomplish God's calling. Jesus had worked miracles and taught with authority in Capernaum; they loved him! The people of Nazareth his hometown wanted him to do the same for them, but really, Joseph's son . . . could do that? Really? You may want Anne to work miracles here at Christ Church, and she might very well do just that. But she's not been called her to save you, Christ Church; our Lord has already done that. She's been called to be among you as your pastor, teacher, priest, and companion in this journey of faith. Jesus told the people in Nazareth, that God's love was so much broader than they could imagine, so broad as

to feed a Gentile widow in Zarephath while famine struck Israel, and heal a Gentile Syrian military officer, even though Israel had plenty of lepers. God's love extended beyond Israel to the nations. So it is God's love extends beyond these walls, beyond this congregation, diocese, and church to those who might be deemed unlovable, unworthy, and unacceptable for any reason. When God's love was pointed out to the Nazarenes as being that broad, they wanted to kill Jesus in a rage. Let's hope I'm not drawing too close a parallel here! Anne's task before you is to remind you of God's love, to love you as God created you and to live that love in a community called Christ Church. You, my friends, are to do the same.

Hope, trust, pray, and believe that Bishop Meade's words come true again, that "the people of Clarksburg and Bridgeport expressed a strong desire to have a minister sent to them, and I was truly happy to be able to gratify their request in a manner well calculated to the interests of religion and the church in that region." May God bless these next years of you and Anne together to spread God's love in this community as you love one another. Amen.