

SERMON 927

Feast of the Annunciation

March 25, 2015

990th Week as Priest

817th Week at St Dunstan's

82nd Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

BELONGING WITH PASSION

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN.

The Feast of the Annunciation is a peculiarity of the liturgy, occurring as it does in this final week of the Season of Lent. The purple is set aside for a little while, and we burn the Paschal Candle. The Annunciation recalls for us the visit of the Angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, announcing that she will bear a son and that he will be called Emmanuel, that is, "God who is with us."

We are called back to the very beginning of the story of Jesus of Nazareth, and it happens just as we are to enter the Week of the Passion. We belong to a story that is told each church year, and it is a story of holy purpose and overwhelming courage. It is the story that defines who we are as followers of Christ. It is a story of belonging and of passion.

As you know, we have been celebrating the Year of Belonging for the 2014-2015 academic year. I've been surprised and very pleased to discover how important a sense of belonging is to people in general, but particularly to the members of St. Dunstan's. I should have known this. More than a half-century ago, a famous sociologist identified a hierarchy of needs. The most basic of needs is that of food, shelter, and clothing. Next is safety and security. But the third level of need is that of belonging.

As we are about to begin Holy Week, or the Week of the Passion, I think it is helpful to consider this as a most important time of belonging. We follow the journey of Jesus from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem to his arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection. Each day in the Week of the Passion is essential. Jesus gathers his disciples for important final teachings and holy actions—washing their feet; celebrating the Passover, transforming that meal into the Holy Eucharist, the Lord's Supper; courage and determination in the face of his accusers; suffering and faithfulness to God as he stands before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate; and sacrifice in his death on a cross.

We should realize that we cannot belong to this way of life in a careless and half-hearted manner. Christianity demands our full commitment. Christ deserves our full devotion. In this way of living, we ought to realize that we belong to Christ in his passion, and that we are marked as his own for ever. AMEN.