

WELCOMING IN CHRIST
Monthly Devotional Reflections
Anticipating the St. Paul's Anniversary Campaign

AUGUST 2018

Season after Pentecost with the expanding mission and influence of the church
St. Paul's sixty years of programs achieving both growth and outreach

TEXTS:

I Kings 8:25-30, 41-43 *"Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Regard your servant's prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays toward this place. Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling place; heed and forgive.... Likewise when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a distant land because of your name—for they shall hear of your great name, your mighty hand, and your outstretched arm—when a foreigner comes and prays toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and so that they may know that your name has been invoked on this house that I have built."*

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13 *I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*

REFLECTIONS: The household of faith has many iterations. King Solomon built the First Temple which is described in magnificent detail in I Kings 5-7. Constructed in the 10th century BCE, it was an extraordinary achievement—a holy place for prayer and sacrifices for the people of Israel as well as for strangers—and a resting place for the Ark of the Covenant. The building served over four centuries until it was destroyed in 587 BCE by the conquering Babylonians. Seventy years later it was rebuilt as the Second Temple by faithful exiles returning home to Israel under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. The Second Temple served until 70 CE when it was destroyed by the Romans. A gathering place for the worship of God is sacred, be it a simple hut or a splendid cathedral. For a congregation, the church, synagogue, or mosque is where generations gather praise and to pray to God. Church is also about fellowship and

instruction. St. Paul's Church is where we may grow in unity and understanding, be renewed in grace, be comforted and challenged—always “equipping the saints for the work of ministry” which reaches out, welcoming and serving all. The physical place as well as the Spirit within it require the best that we can bring and give, acknowledging that all belongs to God.

PRAYERS: As we prepare for the 60th birthday of St. Paul's Church in September, let us pray for strength and wisdom to lead lives “worthy of the calling” thankful for what God has provided and eager to build up the body of Christ among friends and strangers. We remember with thanksgiving the many special, innovative programs that have engaged us and others in the life of the Church—our preschool and ministries with children and youth, the annual LobsterFest, missions around Cary, music, study. And we also celebrate the weekly routines of Sunday school, worship, Bible study, visitation, and quiet service.

Redeeming Sustainer, visit your people and pour out your strength and courage upon us, that we may hurry to make you welcome not only in our concern for others, but by serving them generously and faithfully in your name. Amen.



The Peaceable Kingdom by Edward Hicks, 1826 American. The National Gallery of Art.
[Vanderbilt Divinity School Common Lectionary Resource]

ART: The prophet Isaiah (11:1-9) anticipates the coming of an extraordinary individual, gifted by the Spirit of the Lord, who inaugurates the “peaceable kingdom” where enemies, natural and political, live in harmony. Edward Hicks, born in 1780 in rural Pennsylvania, who was employed as a house and coach painter, became a Quaker preacher in 1812 and began making art. Sixty-two of his paintings are about the peaceable kingdom, honoring the achievement of salvation by yielding one's self-will to the divine power, the “Christ within,” which reconciles and makes all things new. What unexpected relationships are apparent in this painting?

ACTION: Why has this parish prospered? How might the Holy Spirit be inviting our participation in the peaceable kingdom through the ministries of St. Paul's Church? What programs are the most meaningful and why? Are we attentive and responsive to needs and opportunities for innovation? Who are called to be leaders and how do they find the time and energy? Start a conversation with church friends about these questions and be prepared for God's surprises.