

What does God require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. — Micah 6:8

The Past Four Years and Lessons Learned

It is hard to put words to what I felt on Sunday, February 1 as we dedicated our new addition. The weather was picture perfect. Each element of worship—the prayers, the hymns, the sermon, communion, the congregational processional to the dedication site, Regina's words, the dedication litany, the anointing, and singing Sally's hymn—all felt like holy and sacred acts. It was indeed a good and joyous day in the life of Pullen. On that day, my heart and soul felt full and I was honored to be one of the pastors of this church.

In the days since Dedication Sunday, I have reflected on what I have learned in these past four years about church and ministry and being a pastor. I will start with what I have learned about being a pastor. First lesson: No matter how hard I might try to make everyone happy, it's not going to happen. Second lesson: It's not my job to make everyone happy. It is my job to listen to the concerns of individuals and offer whatever bit of wisdom I might have as I keep the needs of the entire community in mind. Third lesson: As a pastor, my clarity is important and it must be my priority to do the work I must do in order to offer my best thinking to the community. Fourth lesson: Maintaining relationships through disagreement may be the hardest but most significant work a pastor does. Fifth lesson: There is a balance to be found between nurturing the institution and caring for the people.

The lessons I've learned about church life and ministry will not surprise you. I have learned, or had affirmed once again, that people's emotions about church and their faith come from a place of passion and conviction. I have learned that in ministry (and in life) some problems can be solved, but with others the best we can do is name them and learn to live with them. I've learned that when it comes to matters of conscience and principle, especially with issues of faith, some people will become alienated from church. With that, I am reminded again, that church can be a place of pain and a sanctuary for healing. And last, I name what this church keeps teaching me: *God doesn't call us to be perfect; God calls us to be faithful.* It is my strong belief that while we are not perfect, and while our life and ministry together sometimes gets very complicated because of our individual passions and beliefs, we are a church dedicated to practicing compassion, seeking justice, encouraging honest relationship, and asking the hard but relevant questions of our faith. And in so doing, we are not perfect, but we are being faithful.

I would like to say that these are lessons learned for a lifetime; however, I am aware that much of what we learn in life has to be relearned again and again. Hopefully each time the learning goes deeper, lasts longer, and becomes a part of who we are. It is my hope that we will always pay attention to what we are learning as a church as we seek to be the church, and how those learnings can help us be a more faithful community for the present and in the future.

As crazy as it might sound, I look forward to the next important decision that we as a church family will undertake; for it is in such times that we learn what is most important to us and it gives us an opportunity to work out together what it means to be God's faithful people. Maybe our experience of these past four years with the lessons learned is what the scripture means when it encourages us to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling." With hope and peace of mind, I am grateful for these lessons.

—Nancy

