

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Please be seated.

Good Morning Everyone!

I want to thank you all for having me back here at St. Andrew's on this Sunday morning and second to last Sunday of the Epiphany season, as we inch closer to Lent. I believe it was the middle of September when I preached here last and the time since then has been flying. Much of my job over this time has included traveling throughout the Northwest Region of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut and engaging with parishes, clergy, parishioners, community organizations, and more. My responsibilities continue to include the building of new connections, convening groups, catalyzing, and working to expand our capabilities. As I make my way through our 28 churches and hold office hours at Camp Washington in our Region, I'm understanding how each group continues to bring its own unique energy and abilities with them. I'm in awe as I

keep finding a strong sense of Holy Spirit and God's presence working their way in our shared life together.

Anyways, back to the Gospel. This week, I'm struck by the ideas of our spiritual growth and what it means to engage in forgiveness in relationship with one another. In Corinthians, this morning, we hear of being infants in Christ. I'm reminded that it takes time to grow in and with Jesus. Yet, as these spiritual infants, we are nurtured, we are cared for. Just as a parent cares for their child, grow and learn, mistakes and successes. The milk, which Paul says we are given, lets us be loved by and grow into our creator God.

There's a growing edge that takes as we come to follow Jesus too. We're not expected to be perfect. Once we've come to a stable place, we might be ready. Yet it's still can be a hard journey to get there. Based on the fact that we are in relationship with so many people, we are bound to have fighting or strife. It's part of being human. It is our goal

though to ease these tensions, to reconcile with one another, commanded by Jesus.

I love the imagery we hear of the garden and creation that Paul continues to give to us. We, in our earthly lives, can do everything needed to prepare our seeds to grow. Yet, it is in creation, through our Creator God, that life is initiated. I think that its important that we recognize and remember that each of us has a role to each other. A relationship with each other, that allows us to connect. Connect with a purpose. We can choose to come together and strive towards our called life with Jesus.

I think this second reading feeds perfectly into the Gospel for today. It's a hard command to follow with we hear from Jesus. There is that importance of forgiveness. Sometimes we can forgive and reconcile easily. Other times, it can be so hard, so challenging. There are people who just make it difficult.

We also understand that Jesus is calling us to drop the parts of us that are calling us to sin. We all have things that we know are wrong but often feed into them. That's human nature. Jesus is calling us to a new way though. A new way to live. A new way to be. I don't think Jesus expects us to be able to drop some off our toxic habits at once, but in time, with growth and cultivation, this is what we can do. Just as we hear again in the second reading. We are the garden. We can grow into newness, we are watered. Our habits can change, our sins can dissolve, and we can reach new heights in ourselves.

Jesus' command to us this morning is forgiveness. Forgiveness is a challenge. It pushes us to new limits as it stretches us, morphs us. In my life, I can think of instances where I know that on-going quarrel with someone can begin to eat at away. It starts to take hold and begins to impact our lives and our decisions. There's an unhealthiness to holding onto anger, fear, and these negative feelings. Jesus tells us to release them. Forgiving is healthy for both parties involved. It's a feeling, an

action, and a commandment. I've been taking part in the Alpha program at St. Paul's Brookfield this winter, which is like a 101 to our Christian faith, and this idea of forgiveness came up as an early topic. Hearing the testimony of people when they realize the necessity to let go and transform is a powerful thing.

As we leave St. Andrew's this morning. I hope that we can take with us the idea that we are loved. We are nurtured by a loving God, we are taken care of with the Creation around us, cultivated just like a garden. Jesus tells us to drop the things that are holding us back. If we can release the weights keeping us down, there's so much we can accomplish. Forgiveness and love can spread. Amen.