

For the Long Haul
May 4, 2008
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I propose to show that All Saints is in it for the long haul, so that those hearing this sermon may give generously to make it so.

May the God who....

(Please be seated.)

Good Morning.

Jesus said, “ I will be with always to the end of the
age.” For the long haul...

For the long haul...

A couple of weeks ago

my best friend Adrienne was in town

visiting from Seattle.

While she was visiting we

were unloading the dishwasher—

because I'm that much fun to visit

—and in the top rack

of the dishwasher

was my most favorite mug.

Adrienne pulled it out—

marveling—saying,

“My God Bonnie

you’ve had this mug

as long as I’ve known you.”

The mug was a gift

from another dear friend.

[My friend] Debbie gave me the mug

to celebrate the summer

we both lived in Venice Beach, California.

She sent it to me

when Walter Mondale and Geraldine Ferraro
were on the democratic presidential ticket
and Dallas was not yet in re-runs.

The mug's color scheme
is reminiscent of the preppy world of the 80's
—it is turquoise with a pink band around the bottom.

It has a wide mouth
and a thin handle.

Its heft is equal to its proportions.

And it's really rather pretty to look at.

It's a mug that I've had for 25 years.

It has been in six different moving vans

and hung in seven different kitchen cabinets.

There's something about that mug

—wrapping my hands around it

on cold mornings

—the first hit of a hot beverage—

on my lips over my tongue—

down to my gut.

The contrast between the tan beverage

—be it coffee or tea—

and its green/blue sides-

-the sheer number of mornings—

the mug and I have spent together

is really rather remarkable.

Because there it is unchipped—

undamaged—

showing very little signs of age

in comparison to my body

that seems to be wrinkling,

flaking and chipping

at a polar ice shelf's pace.

The older I get—

the more I appreciate someone

—something

that has some staying power.

That mug—my Rose Café—Venice Beach mug

—seems to be with me for the long haul.

For the long haul...

What about this place

—the oldest wood frame church

still in use in the city of Chicago

and on the outside it looks it

—what about this place?

More than 125 years ago—

on January 15, 1882 a group of people

from Ravenswood, IL

gathered to hold

the town's first Episcopal worship service.

The year 1882,

in case it has slipped your mind,

is when Chester A. Arthur

was the 21st president

and Dallas, only a city for 26 years,

was 135 years away from being syndicated.

On that cold January morning a group of people

gathered.

*Having no church building of their own,
they asked the pastor
of Ravenswood United Methodist Church
if they might assemble in the Methodist sanctuary.
He agreed and several handfuls of people
came and prayed.*

Lately, as we begin to gather the money

to expand our church school

and shore up our foundation, windows and

walls,

I've found myself thinking

about the people who came together that day

—the folks who met on the corner of Hermitage and

Sunnyside

just a half block away.

I wonder what they looked like.

What type of people were they?

What did they wear?

What events in their lives

caused them

not only to seek out a faith community,

but to start one?

I wonder

if they worried about money, or mortgages

—gas prices certainly weren't an issue,

but still... I wonder if they came that day

hoping to find or found some sort of home.

And because I'm a priest

I wonder about the sermon

at that first worship service;

was it rousing and passionate,

thoughtful and provocative,

was it humble and healing

or did it just

float by the people—spoken—heard—gone?

Certainly something happened that day

—because more than one hundred and twenty plus

years later

here we are.

Those folks who gathered that day

--they had a vision and

we are the inheritors of their dream.

What would they think of us now?

Do you think

the people who started this place

ever had a glimpse of an idea

of what it would be like now?

Could they envision?

Africa Auctions

that make us desperately aware

of the poverty of Sudan

and the riches we have.

Might they have ever foreseen

annual meetings

with red carpets, ball gowns and poporattzi?

Or a Christmas pageant

where Mary and the Donkey

came in second on Dancing with the Stars?

Could those men in top hats

and women in carriages,

people who were alive

when Charles Darwin died,

could they have imagined our place,

this place as it is today?

3500 people in the Ravenswood Run—could **they**

have predicted

300 cars towed????

Those men and those women—oh so long ago--

While they may not have had a glimpse

of who we would be

they did have a hope

and a prayer.

We are the people for whom they hoped,

we are the people for whom they prayed

more than 126 years later—

here we are

in the oldest wood frame church

still in use in the city of Chicago—
and on the outside it looks it—
here we are— still creating a community
— still being a people of faith,
— still
desperately trying
to make a difference in our world.

We are the people for whom they prayed

—we are the people

for whom they built this church.

For the long haul...

What I know is this—

People walk through that door

and lives get changed:

in Africa,

New Orleans,

Ravenswood,

and right here in these pews.

Lives are altered, touched,

changed and transformed.

We've sent letters,

by e-mail and snail mail—

asking each one of you—

to make a significant financial donation

to shore up our walls,

create classrooms for our kids,

and for people who live in or on the edge

of poverty.

I'm asking you to give generously,

lavishly,

in appreciation

for what this community is for you

and what it may be

—for unknown strangers in years to come.

I'm inviting you—me—all of us to be a community

on whom others can count on—for the long haul.

Amen.

