

Why are we here? That could be one of the great existential questions that like the learned rabbis we could sit and ponder and study for all the days of the rest of our lives. Or, it can just be a simple question with basic answers. I'm here because it's my habit to do this on Sunday. I'm here because my parents made me come. I'm here because my kids expect me to be. I'm here because I wanted to see my friends. I'm here because my teen is in confirmation class and still needs sermon notes. I'm here because this has not been a good week, and I need Pastor to stand at that font and tell me again that my sins indeed are forgiven. I'm here because I feel so alone and I need to feel God's presence. I'm here because my world is caving in around me...because of work...because of relationships...because of health...and I need to hear the promise of resurrection hope...of Easter life.

We come for many different reasons and at the end of the day, we are here because God has called each and every one of us to this Assembly. In our baptisms, God touched our lives with grace, with life, with forgiveness and with the call to be in community with other believers. And that is what our lessons are about today...they are good lessons for our Annual Meeting Sunday. Our first lesson tells us that God gathers us and gives direction for our lives and for our life together. Jesus heals that man in the Gospel and then sends him back into community. And in our second lesson Paul talks about living together and doing that which builds others up. God puts us in community so that we can be the people that God has called us to be.

On Thursday and Friday of this week I will be with our seminarians including Vicar Jane as they come home to New Jersey from around the country for their annual meeting with the Bishop and the Candidacy Committee. It is a time to lift up again the reminder of their calling. And as our folks come through this process, one goal that I always have is that at the end they will understand that they are called to be priest and prophet for God's people. As priest they will bring healing and hope, to the broken, the diseased, the hurting, the oppressed and the grieving. They will share that Easter story with all of its promise, with all of its hope. At graveside and bedside they will share that gift of God. And as prophet they will look at God's world and God's people and they will speak the word of the lord. In the best of the prophetic tradition they will stand in the gateway of government and in the portals of business, calling people to justice for the poor, for the broken and for the excluded. And this is not an either/or. A priestly ministry without prophetic words is self centered and self serving. A prophetic ministry without priestly care is cold and shallow. A pastor who is not priest and prophet, is not a pastor.

And the same can be said of God's people, the church. We together in our baptisms are called as priests and prophets for God's people, for God's world. That is why this Family cares for the sick, the hurting and the grieving the way we do. It is why we are at an AIDS center and a Soup Kitchen in Newark. It is why we take a 14 hour bus ride to Appalachia each year. It is why we have Mission Partners in the Portuguese immigrant community in Newark and on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. It is why we have given leadership to the anti-poverty battle here in New Jersey and the ongoing struggle for the full inclusion of all of God's children in the church, in our community, and in our world. It is why we claim our Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh partners to oppose the bigotry and the ignorance that surrounds us and that is constant fuel for political exploitation. It is why God willing we don't fit in

with so much around us. We take seriously the fact that Gospel of Jesus Christ is counter cultural to the society of this sinful and selfish world. That Gospel calls us to a servant ministry and to an Easter hope.

Living that life of faithful response can be hard and that's why we count on the gift of God's Holy Spirit to lift us up and to send us out. And we are able to do that because we stand on this side of Easter. Our eyes have seen the glory of the lord. Glory, glory hallelujah.