

Isaiah 11:1-10

Saint Paul's Episcopal Church

7 December 2025

In nomine...

Several years ago, the vocational deacon who served my parish walked up to my office knocked on the door, asked if I had a minute and then closed the door behind him before sitting down. He had come to tell me that after 33 years of active ministry in the parish that he was retiring. It knocked the wind out of my sails. Three months after that my Associate Rector knocked on that same office door, asked if I had a minute, closed the door behind him and then told me that after several months of discernment that he would be taking a new call-in southern Ohio. Now I know this was a possibility but on the heels of our deacon's retirement, I have hoped that maybe he would wait. Then six months after that our assisting priest who had previously been a parishioner knocked on my office door, asked if I had a minute, closed the door behind him and proceeded to tell me that he and his wife had bought in Cleveland to be closer to their daughter. As a former Pittsburgher the last blow was the worst. To help me out we called an interim associate and then six months later he left.

On Thursday after when I got a text from Father Gabriel asking if I had time to speak on Friday morning, you could imagine how my heart began to race. And at four pm on Friday afternoon when that email left our server here and went to your email inbox, I can imagine and hold a bit of the pain and shock and disappointment that you must have felt. This is the fifth priest to leave this parish since the beginning of 2023 – the eighth if we count the interims. That is a lot, honestly it is too many. The hurt and the grief that is felt in this community from the whirlwind of change over the last few years is real. It was made clear for all to see during the lead up to the formal search process and the yearning for stability has been abundantly clear in the months that I have had the honor of being your rector.

Gabriel is a good priest, joyful, kind, warm, he has an incredible voice, and he has worked diligently for the last couple of years to foster true belonging in this holy place. He and I have not known each other long, but there is, I believe, a budding friendship between the two of us and I am lament that he is leaving – though I am trying to find solace in the reality that he will still be a colleague in this wonderful diocese.

And yet, for all that the uncertainty remains for many of you. Do I open my heart to another priest? When will they leave us? Why do they leave us? How many more times can we do this? These are valid questions and concerns – ones that we will wrestle with. There are no easy answers. It would be simplistic to cast off our vocation of raising of young priests for service in the wider church, but this is not the moment to rush into decisions. We will do the work, we will do it well, and we will do it with intention.

Now, I would be a terrible priest if I did not offer you a word of hope this morning. The prophet Isaiah wrote that “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.” In a time when the poor, the

hurting, the grieving, the wounded – were ignored and overlooked Isaiah wrote of the day when new life, when true life would spring. When a green shoot would grow from what was thought to be dead. And that shoot would change everything. He assured the people that no matter how difficult this hour may be, that God was faithful and just and that a new day, a new Kingdom would be manifest for all to see.

It may not feel like it now, but there is deep resiliency in the Church and in this church. Jesus has come and will come, and all things will be made new. In her Revelations of Divine Love Saint Julian of Norwich wrote, “Also is this revelation He showed a little thing, the size of a hazel nut in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought: ‘What can this be?’

And it was generally answered thus: ‘It is all that is made.’

I marveled how it could continue, because it seemed to me it could suddenly have sunk into nothingness because of its littleness.

And I was answered in my understanding” ‘It continueth and always shall, because God loveth it; and in this way *everything* hath its being by the love of God.’

In this little thing I saw three characteristics:

the first is that God made it,

the second is that God loves it,

the third, that God keeps it.”¹

We are that delicate hazel nut in Jesus’ palm. The very one that God made, the very one that God loves, the very one that God keeps. In a topsy turvy world it can be difficult to feel this consistently. But it is true. Christ our Mother is in love with this place. Christ our Mother is in love with you. Christ our Mother is always with us.

Let us pray. Christ you are our Mother, we pray that you will shepherd us through this season, guide us, lead us, into your holy house; throw open those loving doors that we may dwell with you all our days, keep us safe, comfort us, and draw us to your loving breast – where we will hear your voice gentling whispering to us “all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”² In your most holy name, we pray. Amen.

¹ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Fr John-Julian (Brewster, Mass: Paraclete Press, 2011), 13.

² *Ibid.*, 65.