

October 8, 2023

Big Day or Ordinary Day

Bishop Patricia Lull

This is a **big day**. Pastor Paul Dean, I know you have been praying about this day all through the call process. What would it be like to return to Prince of Peace where you served in the past? Would the congregation receive you as the pastor you are now and not simply hold you to being the pastor you once were? And what about your call at Resurrection Lutheran in Woodbury, a congregation that has grown and thrived through your leadership? Is it the right time to say farewell to **that** congregation to come to **this** congregation? And all through those questions, which you have carried in your heart, has been the most profound question of all – is this new call to Prince of Peace in Burnsville the work of the Holy Spirit?

Today is also a **big day** for all of you at Prince of Peace. Those of you, who served on the call committee, you wrestled with many of the same questions as Pastor Dean – especially as you worked to discern where the Holy Spirit is leading this congregation now.

Those of you on the Board, and staff colleagues, and all of you in this congregation, this is a **big day** for you, as well. Today is a day to give thanks to the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, and the Spirit, who works in and through our human processes and deliberations. So, hooray for all of you who have prayed, or listened carefully, or shared your perspective in this time of transition. And thanks be to God for the unfolding vocation planted in each one of us at our baptism. The Holy Spirit is at work in and through all of us here.

Now, the truth is that our lives are marked by **big days** that we long remember – birthdays and anniversaries; moves across the country or milestones in our family's life. But our lives are lived out in **ordinary days**; the ones we can barely remember when the calendar rolls around to a new month.

I want you to focus on next Tuesday – Tuesday, October 10. Unless it is your birthday, there may not be anything to lift it out of the ordinary. But it is close enough on the calendar that I expect you to remember this sermon when next Tuesday comes

around. Pay attention to what happens on that ordinary day.

All through the Gospels, Jesus teaches by using parables -- those little stories that are designed to catch hold of our imagination, and to plant a question that sticks with us like an earworm that can call us back to a refrain even when we are trying hard not to think about a song. What part of this parable of the sower and the seed sticks with you?

Is it the image of those pesky birds on the path? Maybe it's the image of the rocky ground where growth so quickly comes to an end. Or does hearing this parable speak in a poetic way to the parts of your life that seem chocked off and stunted? Or are you one of the people here who noticed the fantastic return on investment – 100, or 60 or 30-fold?

If we read a little further into chapter 13, St Matthew includes an analogy to make sense of this teaching story. Bible scholars debate whether or not that explanation was offered by Jesus himself or added later to address an early community of faith when their confidence in following Jesus grew thin.

But there is no debate about this. We know that growth comes from God. Growth in faith and witness and endurance as Christian disciples.

These days I am often asked about the future of the church. That is no surprise. After all, we are experiencing a huge shift in our culture and our expectations for our lives. This time of cultural transition was well underway before the pandemic, but in those years as we shifted so many behaviors – including how and when we gather as the church – it became clear that participating in a deep life of faith was not simply part of our general way of life in this culture.

Not everyone who belonged to this congregation three years ago is still showing up. That's not just a Lutheran thing. It's true across all kinds of congregations. More and more adults admit that when it comes to belonging to a church, they are done. And at the very same time, out of the isolation of those pandemic months and the way that many things are so churned up in our culture, brand-new folks are turning toward the church to

find a place of welcome and solace and support for a life that makes sense of being alive in these days.

What a great time this is for all of you at Prince of Peace. Not an easy time, but a time in which to be clear and joyful in your lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. A time to show in each of our lives what it means to trust that growth comes from God. A time to let the power of God's grace, God's generosity, and God's unfailing commitment to be present in our lives and in this world be what others see reflected in us, day-by-day.

Pastor Paul Dean, please remember this day. It is a **big deal** for you and your family. Your gifts, your spiritual maturity, your willingness to collaborate, and your deep heart for the needs of the little and the least – keeping bringing all of those into everything you do in this new pastoral call.

And all of you here, today is also a **big deal** for you. It is an opportunity to remember all the ways God has been with you throughout your life. I tell you, the world needs you – each one of you – to keep showing up as a disciple of Jesus Christ. That is true here on your church campus with the many ministries that flow out of here – faith formation, spiritual care, the incredible witness of the Mission Outpost and the dental clinic, your partnerships in Tanzania and the Dominican Republic. But it is also true in everything you do at home, at work, in the relaxed moments of your life. Everywhere and always, live as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Next Tuesday – October 10th – pay attention. Because on that day, as on every ordinary day, God will give you an opportunity you may not have anticipated to show up as the disciple you are called to be. Thanks be to God. AMEN.