

CHRIST CHURCH FEDERATED
SERMON 8/13/2017

Friday afternoon I changed my mind about what I want to say this morning and chose a different Scripture lesson. More about that later. Our lesson comes from the Hebrew Bible as the first temple was being built.

HEBREW BIBLE LESSON 2 CHRONICLES 7:14-16

14 if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. 15 Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. 16 For now I have chosen and consecrated this house so that my name may be there forever; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time. **SERMON:** "Pay Attention to God!"
Rev. Anderson

Would you please pray with me? Holy One, please reach into everyone here this morning and touch our hearts. Let us feel your love, feel your presence in our lives and know Your desire to be in a relationship with us. Help us feel the need to reach out to you, talk to you, and share Your blessings with all people in our lives. We thank you for your Son, Jesus, and the way he changes our world and our life. Amen.

As I introduced the change in our Scripture lesson, I threw everything I had planned for this morning away on Friday. I was planning to preach on Matthew's telling the story of Jesus walking on water. You might pick up from the planned sermon title in your worship bulletin that I was not too impressed. After virgin birth and bringing people back to life after death, I considered walking on water a pretty minor miracle for God. It did, however, help me understand our need for such things to pay attention to God and not take God for granted.

I give credit for the change to my daughter Shelly, who is visiting for the weekend. We were out doing errands when she said, "I am worried about your church." We have been talking about what has happened here over the last few months.

Shelly just returned from a mission trip to Africa. She met lots of wonderful people, did a lot of good work, had a lot of fun, and even danced a do-see-do with a rhino.

My words with Shelly brought to mind all of the conversations I have had with cabinet members, other clergy and many of you. I have been asked several times, "Is Christ Church going to survive?" I have been in these discussions well before Pastor Mark resigned. Remember I am leading the finance committee and Christ Church's finance reports of the last few years need a plentiful supply of red ink. I am also in worship services most weeks and can see the decline in attendance.

I do not fear for the greater church, "The Body of Christ in the world." It has survived for two thousand years and will be fine. I have been witness to too many church closings over my few years in Christian ministry to not know that congregations pass on just like individuals.

On the other hand, I have watched many congregations that seemed to be on their last legs, make a miraculous recovery. It happens all the time.

What has made the difference is the decision on the part of the people in the church to really pay attention to God.

I worked with a church in the Mohawk Valley in New York that had decline to a few members, all who were pretty senior. Their savings had also declined and they were considering closing their doors. They

first tried something pretty radical. They prayed about it. They prayed together. They prayed in teams. Some wrote prayers, others read psalms and other Biblical prayers, some used Hymns. They all prayed. The message they received was "Feed My sheep!" They lived in a community experiencing economic strain so they used the funds they had to organize free weekly community dinners, for fellowship, for hunger, to get to know the community and for the community to get to know them. After a month, other community groups asked if they could help and others got involved. When I first retired in 2004, they had a year-long waiting list of groups who want to sign up to put on one of the weekly dinners and the church was well attended on Sunday morning.

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I want to propose we organize a prayer vigil before we call in Interim Minister. We should do it before we make a decision on UMC vs. UCC.

Because I always tend to go 'whole hog,' I was thinking we should block off three days, 72 hours, and make up a schedule of teams of at least two people at a time to cover every minute. My wife suggested 1 day, 24 hours was more reasonable. I will leave that up to cabinet. I think we need to tell God that we are serious about our church and need help badly. We know where to go for help, and we are asking.

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