

Sermon for September 13: the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

We begin again.

One of the greatest problems disciples of Jesus Christ have ever faced was the continuing necessity of beginning again.

You know that Jesus' preaching and the hope of the early church was full of eschatological hope.

That is an expensive word but the *eschaton* is simply the last day, the day of the new creation.

Jesus and those who first followed him expected it and expected it soon.

I expect it too, but soon? I am not sure about soon.

When it did not happen soon, the first Christians learned what it meant to begin again.

They learned how to structure their discipleship with a measure of discipline and routine that would invite the Holy Spirit to be at work in them, that they might continually grow in Christ in preparation for that someday, somehow *eschaton*.

If you read the scriptures in the form of daily office, you read through most of the Bible every two years and then begin again.

If you come to church every Sunday, you read through most of the Bible every three years and then begin again.

If you come to church every Sunday from one first Advent to the next, you live a liturgical year in which the whole story of our salvation in Jesus Christ is laid out, and then you begin again.

We begin again today another year of Christian Formation, of Sunday and Wednesday programs for children and adults, of EYC, of Education for Ministry.

We begin these programs and everything else again year after year because of our conviction that our lives are not full without an active engagement with Scripture and the Church's tradition of theology, prayer, and discipleship.

We believe that God spoke and speaks through Scripture and the church; we need to get together and listen.

Did you hear lady Wisdom crying out in the lesson from Proverbs?

Like a long-suffering Sunday-school teacher, she was frustrated and insisted that God's wisdom is readily known to those who are diligent in seeking it.

She says God has spoken clearly, but too many prefer to remain simple and to scoff, too many fools hate knowledge.

We hear the same theme in the Psalm today, that the soul-reviving law of the Lord is perfect and sure and gives wisdom to the innocent.

"The commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to the eyes."

Guessing and speculation are not required; only faithful study and engagement with the Word and the Word Made Flesh.

Though often unknown to the world, the wisdom of the Gospel is readily known.

You and your children can know it in the programs of this church, in your private reading, in your family's prayer, reading, and holy conversation.

We began again, to study scripture and theology, to be formed as disciples, to learn how to pray and serve, that with St. Peter we may speak the truth when asked for it, that we may be able to account for the hope that is in us,

to answer when asked who we follow that it is Jesus, the Messiah, perfect God and perfect man, whose hopes for us are made clear in Scripture and the teaching of the church.

In the months ahead, we do not begin again but carry forward on two important tasks as a church that I need to keep before you.

And frankly, there are days when I feel wobbly and a little bit scared and would just as soon not keep these before you.

One is a facilities review focused on our Parish House.

We built false walls over the plaster walls in the nursery in the building this summer, so that the flaking plaster and paint would be contained and not fall on our children's toys.

That's better, but we begin again today another year in which some of our parents will be unable to drop off or retrieve their children from nursery or Sunday School because there is no elevator or ramp.

I watched this week, as I often do, one of the senior members of our parish, struggle up the steps with her cane in her hand and then lean on the wall to catch her breath.

Yet the prospect of rebuilding or building anew frightens me; it seems too hard, the issues are complex, raising money and dealing with debt are tough.

But here as we begin again, I hear the Lord reminding me and us to set our minds on divine things, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross and follow him.

I should be clear; the Parish House is a cross we bear already. But not one with Resurrection beckoning on the other side.

Is there another cross we might take up, the serious challenge of a new or renewed building, on the other side of which is a resurrection?

The other great question that we continue to consider is adding another service to our schedule.

This will not be easy. It would disrupt our established patterns, force me and many of you to work harder and longer on Sunday morning.

Things are pretty good. Why take a risk that involves so much change and work?

Because the Lord Jesus speaks to us so clearly, saying take up your cross and follow me.

Build up my church, that more of my lost sheep come within my fold.

Be willing, readily willing to sacrifice what you have for the sake of what the Holy Spirit might make of you.

So we begin again, the wondrous work of the church, blessing, proclaiming, learning, sharing, receiving the clear knowledge and abundant mercy of Jesus Christ.