

Sermon St. James' Day 2010 and Installation of Fr. Cannon

This morning I want to begin with a story shared by Archbishop Desmond Tutu at the consecration of our new bishop Ian Douglas. Tutu said there once was a curate in a parish that seemed to preach every sermon on the same theme...that of sacramental confession." The parishioners were tired of sermons on confession and so was his boss the rector. It seemed that no matter the text he was able to weave sacramental confession into the sermon. It was his obsession. The rector thought what can I do...then he came upon a solution. He assigned the young curate to preach on the feast of St. Joseph. He thought that there is no way the curate can preach on sacramental confession on the feast of St. Joseph. So the young curate gets up in the pulpit...and begins. St. Joseph was the foster father of our Lord....he was also a carpenter....and I bet he built confessionals.

Today I get to speak of one of my obsessions...what it means to be an effective minister. I'm fortunate, because today I can do it in the context of our Vicar Emeritus, the Rev. Canon David L. Cannon who was vicar here from 1964 to 1999. He needs no introduction today, but I thought I'd share a few thoughts all the same.

The first thing I want to say that may surprise you is that I found out that David failed in his assigned mission when he came to St. James in 1964. He was sent here lo those many years ago to close this church. As we can see here today, he was an utter failure at that task. So, on behalf of this congregation and myself, I want to first say thank you for your lack of achievement at your assigned task.

People will often ask me what it takes to be a good priest or minister. I was asked this question by the commission on ministry prior to my ordination. It didn't take me long to give them an answer. Different priests have different gifts and excel at different things all of which are needed in a congregation, but there is one defining quality above all else that one must have to be an effective minister and that is "**Your people must know that you love them.**" You can do a lot of things well and a lot of things wrong, but if the people know you love them, they'll put up with quite a lot. It's the kind of thing that you can't quantify. It's like going into someone's house. You know the moment you walk in the door if there is love in that house or not. You simply feel its presence. This is true of good ministers, you know if they love you or don't.

Since 1964, **David Cannon has loved you, and you know it.** It's apparent all around this church and in this community.

- He loved you enough to fail in his assigned mission by the diocese.
- For some of you he loved you from the moment you were born. He loved you through your baptism, your first time at the communion rail or in Sunday school.
- He loved you when you started school or joined the scouts.
- He loved you when you made your parent's life hell and when you made them proud.

- He loved you when you went to your first prom or graduated high school.
- He loved you when you met that special one and walked down this aisle. He loved you when you had your own children.
- He loved you when you were sick and visited at your bedside in the hospital or at home.
- And, he loved many of those you loved at the moment of their death, celebrating their lives and walking with you through your grief and loss.
- He loved you through the fish fry's, through Cannonball runs, through strawberry suppers, through Christmases and Easters and all the times in between.

I received a letter from a good friend of David's that confirms what I've been saying that I'd like to read at this time. (*Letter from Bob Hall*)

Following the likes of David Cannon is no easy task. He's a man who is bigger than life, a giant in this community and within the diocese. He has left Jackie Sheldon and now me some pretty big shoes to fill. I can only say how happy I am that he will use some of his time in retirement to more formally connect again with us in this congregation.

My hope and my pledge to you as I take on my role as vicar is that I will follow David in that one all important quality of being an effective priest. I

will do some things well and some things not so well, but I hope I will always emulate David in his love for you. I so very much look forward to having David to help and guide me as we share in ministering among members of this congregation and community well into the future.

May all of us who are called in our vocation and ministry follow David's lead in his care and concern for one another, for our faith community and for the community in which we live.

Let us pray.

Almighty and everlasting God, we thank you for your servant David whom you called to preach the Gospel to the people of St. James Poquetanuck. Give your grace we humbly beseech you, to David as our Vicar Emeritus and to all who are called to any office and ministry for your people; and so fill us with the truth of your doctrine and clothe us with holiness of life, that we may faithfully serve before you, to the glory of your great name and for the benefit of your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever. Amen.