December 27, 2020 2nd Sunday after Christmas - B

St. Gabriel

Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 84: 1-8, Eph 1:3-6; 15-19a; Luke 2:41-52

Let Us Pray: O God, who wonderfully created St. Gabriel Parish, and yet is even more wonderfully restoring St. Gabriel’s dignity of human nature and purpose: Grant that we may share more fully in the divine life with him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Please be seated.

This weekend marks my 40th year in ministry. 7 and ½ of those years I spent as a healthcare chaplain. To this day when I visit a hospital and I hear the sound for a Code Blue every nerve in my body comes to attention and my adrenaline surges.

A Code Blue means that a patient is in severe distress. Most often their heart has stopped and CPR – cardiopulmonary resuscitation – heart compressions – must begin at once.

A whole host of people from every corner of the hospital races in. In addition to nurses and paramedics administering the compressions, there are doctors, lab technicians, transporters, surgeons, therapists, patient techs, even housekeepers. There are time keepers and people to count the compressions. Various doctors are shouting out orders. All the while a calm unit secretary is passing out the patient labels to make certain everyone is keeping track of the patient’s name for accurate charting and for post procedure check ups.

No less than 15 people in the room at one time. A multitude of others are racing in and out bringing supplies and checking on things. Security keeps vigilence for any lookey lous and traumatized family members. My primary job is to pray (for patient & staff), to care for any family that might be present.

Each person from doctor and nurse to the secretary and housekeeper has a vital role in keeping the patient alive!

Later that night, I when I rounded again I will have checked on every code blue patient again. And I would have found that the nurse and every other staff member will have checked at least one more time before their shift ended.

That’s what teams do…that’s the dignity of human nature, how God wires us to care for one another.

So why am I telling you this story?

Well, I’ve been here a month, so by now you know I like to tell stories. Usually when I preach they are directly connected to the readings.

It was not the readings that spoke to my heart this week, but the Collect:

*O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature……to share our humanity*

**To share our humanity**

To be honest, I’ve been more than struggling with that humanity thing for the past couple weeks. First I thought it was the blues of Christmas and missing my family and the craziness of COVID.

Some folks had Bill & me over for dinner and that helped. One couple took us to see the lights. I even finally got a hippopotamus…

And still my tears continued…it was when I read the Collect that I knew the source of my tears … an absence of humanity

Ever since I first arrived at St. Gabriel’s I kept hearing about what “we used to do”, “how things used to be”, even before COVID. I’ve sat with parishioners and staff listening to your stories of feeling left out, forgotten, disconnected. I want you to know, I have heard your pain. I have seen your pain, even behind your masks. I feel your pain.

You are not alone.

We are in this together.

Now, I want to tell you about my Bill. It’s not easy being married to a clergy person, especially if she’s a crier. He’s had to put up with a lot. I’m pretty sure he’s in line for sainthood. You can tell him I said that.

When Bill and I began going together, he had this almost magical power over me, when I get super stressed, he just gathers me in his arms and I immediately feel the stress drain from me. (That’s really why I married him, that and he makes me laugh).

And he’s taught me a lot of things. Like it it’s ok to get lost sometimes. You get to see things you never saw before and meet people you might never had otherwise.

It’s ok to try things and fail, at least you tried.

One thing he taught me is that when he has a problem he thinks about it before he goes to sleep and in the morning he has the solution. He just releases it. So I try to release it over to God (well, usually I have to rant and rave and lose a few nights sleep first).

On Friday morning –after several days of agony, God woke me up with the letters C-P-R but not cardiopulmonary resuscitation but

--- **CHRIST REMAINS PRESENT.**

I had to think about that – a lot!

Christ remains Present!

I realized I had worked myself into such a state that I was totally empty…because I was trying to do it all by myself and everything all at once!

I had forgotten a very basic principle – WE – you – you and me are the Church and each of us has a very integral part of keeping church alive and that means caring for one another, reaching out to one another, connecting, checking in! (Story of Valarie)

I had forgotten – actually anyone could have done it---

I’m doing it now – I’m sounding a CODE BLUE – all hands on deck because

CPR means CHRIST’s PRESENCE REMAINS – CHRIST REMAINS PRESENT

In each one of us and means we reach out to one another!!!

As a shepherd, even merely an interim one, I love my sheep. And you, each of you are my sheep. You, we, are St. Gabriel’s. And right now, St. Gabriel’s is both the patient and the team/the community of care providers…

CHRIST REMAINS PRESENT and

We are in this together.

How do we help feel they belong here again?!

Christ is the great physician and healer of us all. We have only to follow Him.

Christ is working in us and with us and through us! Will you let Him?!

A young doctor I worked with in the hospital told me that whenever something went awry, rather than sensing defeat, he would ask: “what am I to learn from this?”

While we have faced some difficult times over the past few years and the Corona Virus has been devastating, deadly and forever life altering, there is much to be learned especially in our relationships with one another, with the Church and with

Christ Jesus. What are we to learn by **not** sitting side by side in the pews? And wearing masks, and not meeting regularly? By being challenged to be and do ifferently than we are accustomed?

The center of our faith remains in the Eucharist. The Eucharist is an inexhaustible richness expressed by the different names we give it. It is verb, adjective and noun. It was the Last Supper Jesus shared with his apostles on the night in which he was betrayed. It was Paul’s plea for the Corinthians to remain united by gathering for Eucharist: *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.*

 **CHRIST’S PRESENCE REMAINS!!!**

All who eat the one broken bread, Christ, enter into communion with him and form but one body in him. We are Eucharistic people. We celebrate Jesus’ presence in the Blessed Sacrament. We receive communion. And we celebrate the Eucharist through service to others and we are continually in the Presence of Christ. For it is both an invitation and a challenge to be Eucharist for others.

And we have learned that while the Corona Virus limits us it does not stop our humanity nor keep us from being united in Christ. Nor does it prevent us from being Eucharist for others. We were baptized into Christ, we have shared in the One Bread and the One Cup. Christ remains in us and we remain in Him.

I’m a Daughter of the King. I love our motto and I really think it should be the motto of every Episcopalian!!! Ladies, please join me:

*I am but one, but I am one. I cannot do everything; but I can do something.*

*What I can do, I ought to do. What I ought to do, by the grace of God, I will do. Lord, what will you have me do?*

Next week we will install the members of the search committee for our next rector but there is much to be done before the process begins.

We must look inside to discover WHO we are, to reach out to one another again, to heal, to reconnect, to redefine…

**CHRIST’S PRESENCE REMAINS**

On January 31st after the 10AM Liturgy, we will have our annual parish meeting. Please be present with your ideas, your dreams, hopes… I am here. I am here for you…this is our parish…together we can heal. Together we are St. Gabriel Parish where **Christ’s Presence Remains always**.

Amen.

Let us pray: Let Us Pray: O God, who wonderfully created St. Gabriel Parish, and yet is even more wonderfully restoring St. Gabriel’s dignity of human nature and purpose: Grant that we may share more fully in the divine life with him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.