

Give us ears to hear, O Lord, and hearts to trust in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The year was 1990, and to the best of my memory, the month was March. It was a Wednesday evening, and the occasion was the monthly meeting of the New Haven Deanery. The focus of the meeting was Ministry in Higher Education, and since I was, at the time, one of the Chaplains at Yale, I was vitally interested in the discussion.

What really made the evening especially memorable, at least for me, was the reaction to a comment I made toward the end of the meeting. I was extolling the virtues of that wonderful crowd of young persons in whose midst I worked, and I observed that one thing that made campus ministry so pleasant was never ever having to hear the phrase: "but we've always done it that way".

Well, of course I never heard that phrase. Students come and go; campus congregations have a 'shelf life' of four years. So students don't know anything about 'how things have always been'. (To be sure, they're more than a bit prone to rush in headlong where wiser, grayer heads might fear to tread.) But in my six years as a College Chaplain, I never heard the phrase: "but we've always done it that way".

Well, I wish you could have seen the facial expression of every adult in the room. It gave new meaning to the word 'wistful'. 'But we've always done it that way'; how we do hate change! Change is something we (more experienced) adults don't always deal with very gracefully, and we almost always don't deal with it eagerly. Let's face it, they don't call Connecticut the 'Land of Steady Habits' for nothing.

Now sometimes, it is certainly true, we resist change because not all change is good. Not all change is good. I'm sure I'll be forever nostalgic for the 'good old days' when the pace of life seemed slower and much more gentle. Not all change *is* good; and sometimes we really should hang on to the way 'things have always been'.

But let's face it, often we resist change simply out of fondness for the same old same old. The status quo may not always be great, but at least it's familiar, right? Except, that the season has changed here at St. Ann's, because the Rector has left. And because the 'status' is no longer 'quo', 'we've always done it that way' doesn't really fit. At this moment in time, we're at a turning point in the life of this parish.

Well, in today's Gospel reading, we heard about another turning point: the Confession of St. Peter. Jesus asked the disciples: 'who do you say that I am' And Peter answered: 'you are the Messiah'.

My guess is that even though Peter spoke the truth for all the ages, he probably didn't have a clue about the magnitude of his words. Not until after the Crucifixion and Resurrection, did Peter realize just what it meant that Jesus is the Messiah. But even so, when Peter spoke that day, it was a critical turning point, because from that moment, Jesus turned his primary focus from ministering to the public to equipping the disciples to continue his work.

Such a moment – such a turning point – is now ours here at St. Ann's. Because in the same vein as Jesus asked those first disciples: 'who do you say that I am?', Jesus now asks St. Ann's: 'who do you say that you are?'

Well, at the moment, we are a parish in transition. We are a community for whom the question: 'who are we?' is the question of the moment. It's a question that quite naturally invades our hearts and minds right now, but also it's the question of the moment because it is only when we have dared to ask and begun to answer the question: 'who do we say that we are?', when we have first searched for the parish, that we can get about the business of searching for a new Rector.

It is when we have dared to ask and have begun to answer the question: 'who do we say that we are' that we can begin to search for the new Rector. And the question is not only 'who do we say that we are?', but who do our neighbors say that we are. That too is no small question, because however our neighbors see us, is what they will think of God.

If our neighbors see us lying, stealing, and cheating, and fighting, they're going to think God is like that. If, on the other hand, we hold love and

mercy and justice as our values, and if we confess our sins and accept God's forgiveness when we stray from those values, then our neighbors will think God is like that.

Who do we say that we are? And who do our neighbors say that we are? Big questions, especially right now, and like Peter, we may not fully comprehend how important the answers may be. But we do have some guideposts. In fact, as chance would have it, we have one especially good guidepost in today's appointed reading from the Old Testament.

That guidepost is the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah had been assigned by God difficult and often thankless work. But even so, Isaiah managed to convey a sense of joy and adventure in the midst of challenge. And when people got fussy or disagreed with him, Isaiah didn't fuss back, but instead issued an invitation: 'let us stand up together'.

The joy of challenge and adventure, and even in disagreement, still community. The supreme guidepost, of course, was Jesus. Today we heard Jesus describe and prepare to face his own scary fate. He knew he would suffer, be rejected, and be killed. But Jesus never doubted God. He was absolutely steadfast in his faith that God is the Lord of Life and wills only the best for this world.

This isn't the season of 'but we've always done it that way'. It is instead the season of challenge and adventure. It is also the season of invitation. When we are invited to ask: 'who do we say that we are?' It is the season when we are invited into community, even when we disagree. It is the season when we are invited to find new life by encountering the Lord of Life - the Lord of Life who wants only the best for us and who lived and died and loved and rose to offer us new life.

It is the season when we at St. Ann's are invited into joyful adventure as God's beloved.

Shall we?

Amen.