

Pentecost 12

I was very pleased for your parish family to receive the e-mail indicating that Fr. Johnston had been called and accepted the call to be your Rector. A “few” years ago I was serving as the Assistant to the Rector at Christ Church, New Bern who at that time was Ed Sharp. We would usually get together each day for conversations. One day we were talking and he said, “I want to tell you what I think makes a good priest. The priest needs to be a good administrator and also a good leader of worship. The priest also needs to offer thoughtful and prayerful sermons. He needs to make visits to homes and hospitals and be present to parishioners in various times of need.” And then he said that the most important thing, from his perspective, was that the people in that parish needed to know that their priest cared deeply for each and every one of them. His words impacted heavily upon me.

As I have gone through the years of my priesthood, that last section, pastoral care, struck me as the most important. What I have also come to believe is that that last section, of people knowing you care about them, is not a call just to a Deacon, or Priest or Bishop but indeed it is the call of our Lord upon every one of us regardless of roles or status. I have mentioned in the past that one of my favorite passages in Holy Scripture comes from the Old Testament prophet Micah when he wrote, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God.”

To do justice, in one sense, is the realization that every single human being is a beloved child of God, equally cherished and worthy of our attempting to understand who they are and what influences have impacted them in healthy and sometimes unhealthy ways. Every one of us, in thought or action or words, have made mistakes and sometimes lived below the person not only God calls us to be but we strive to be.

That leads us to Micah’s second admonition, to love mercy. We are grateful to those who have forgiven us for our misdeeds and we are called to be agents of forgiveness as well. That does not mean that we are not accountable for our

actions, nor are we called to pass over those who have committed grievous actions as though they were insignificant offenses against the community. To love mercy is a call to a life of understanding and caring and that most certainly includes forgiving and seeking forgiveness to ensure our individual and communal well-being.

And that leads us to Micah's last admonition, to walk humbly with our God. None of us, layperson, Deacon, Priest, Bishop, whomever, ever have it all together. We are called on a journey, a journey toward God which is a journey toward wholeness. We are called to strive to do God's will but none of us have the full knowledge accompanying that journey. Again, we need one another to help us learn, to educate and discern that which is healthy, appropriate and creative during that journey. The only Absolute guidance we have to acknowledge what we do not know is the gift of the Holy Spirit, assisting us in our efforts to discern what is good and healthy and challenging us along the way to care for our brothers and sisters as we travel this journey together.

Amen