

## Homily on the Occasion of Frank Allen's 20th year anniversary as Rector

“The Greatest among you will be your servant.” Matthew 23:12

I am standing in this particular place for one reason. About 13 years ago or so, in my early days of retirement, when I was probably driving my good wife nuts around the house, she suggested I might go over to the church around the corner and see what was happening. It was one Sunday then, when I went and listened to this slightly balding essential young man preach. And do you know what? He preached the Gospel and I heard it. I, who in my over-weaning self-esteem thought I knew just about everything, but discovered I didn't, been just about everywhere, made every mistake, but been plucked repeatedly out of pits by the Grace of God, been a priest for about 40 years, I finally heard deeply, the Gospel.

“The greatest among you will be your servant.”

Of course I, like my pal Bill Wood, had heard and done some things in this parish since the 60's But changes had occurred. One in particular I noticed that day 13 years ago when walking out of the old chapel—and you may well think this insignificant, but there used to be a parking spot right outside the office door with a conspicuous sign which pronounced in bold black letters: “Rector's Parking”. The sign was gone. And, as you now may or may not know, our austere rector now parks anywhere and always on Sundays at the farthest corner of the Knewstub parking lot next to the dumpsters. By example, others of us do the same now.

“The greatest among you will be your servant.”

The Gospel which his predecessor Jesus Christ preached, and the Gospel that He *was*, led him to be beaten, bruised and crucified. And this is the God we worship, not some sort of a he-man God, decked in gold and diamonds, haughtily demanding his subjects grovel at his feet. Frank has not been physically bruised and beaten in that way—not that he and his family haven't had their physical “knocks” for sure. But I can assure you, that being the Rector of any church big or small, is no walk in the park, unless you think of the park as having roller coasters, halls of mirrors, and ghost houses among the delights and wonders of God's grace that also abound in this church. The authority that comes with being the captain of such a ship, is a tricky thing to handle well. It's like a strong seductive scent that can mount in a person's head and lift him or her to the heights before an inevitable crash. Look at the folk who wanted to coronate Jesus only to be roundly

disappointed and scornful when he chose not a gold crown, but one of thorns, not a diamond studded throne, but a bloody cross.

“The greatest among you will be your servant.”

Good old Alison Harrity liked to tease Frank from time to time and say to him “Hey Boss”. Frank always smiled and said: “Underling—on your knees!” The Gospels have no distinct reports of Jesus’s sense of humor, although a few of our Lord’s comments do suggest he had a fine one, such as describing people who have a log stuck under their eyelids, but only notice the speck of dust in someone else’s eye. Not to mention Jesus creating the trunks on elephants, the beaks on Dodo birds or a skunk. If you have a sense of humor, like Frank does, and find ways to make *yourself* the butt of the joke frequently, it’s a sign that you’re less likely to end up all puffed up and swollen, pressed like a balloon against the ceiling. Humor used that way is a kindness to other people.

“The greatest among you will be your servant.”

And we know how this servant of almighty God *has* gotten beaten up from time to time along the way of life and his ministry. And I am not speaking simply of the plane crash where his new friend in the seat near him was killed, where Frank got badly knocked around. Worse, he had to watch his dear Amy half killed and his kids badly injured, being winched up in a C.G. helicopter hovering precariously 300 feet above the dense forest where the crash occurred. But not only the vicissitudes of physical things, I think of the psychological wear and tear on his neck as a result of turning his other cheek in the face of occasional aggression, small and great, coming at him. No, I’m not saying he’s perfect at it – no no. But I’ve seen him manage to do it over and over, times when a guy like me might well have whacked away in response. He’s no immaculate conception, but he is a saint and perfect in the way Jesus used the word perfect to mean “thoroughly made”, not some preening ideal person without faults. Frank is fully like his relative Saint Paul, also a “thoroughly made” guy who called himself the chief sinner and repeatedly did things he knew he shouldn’t be doing or thinking of doing.

“The greatest among you will be your servant.”

Then there are the blessings that abound in his personal life, his great kids, and especially his brave mate Amy, her support, from time to time his fine critic no doubt, and her steadfastness in love for this man who, like men in general, aren’t that easy to live with.

That solid personal life has certainly been the launch pad from which he has enabled this church to grow and thrive to the point where it has become one of the most vibrant, big and materially blessed Episcopal churches in the nation, well equipped therefore for its many missions and outreach programs, a resource for others.

Much of this growth and thriving can also be attributed to his capacity to say “Yes,” a word I suspect he learned at the knee of his serious Christian mother years ago. She too was acquainted with grief yet could teach that child of hers that indeed, as St Paul put it: “all thing work together for good for those who love God—who are called according to his purposes”—all things, not some—all. Parishioners have come to him with this idea and that over time, and 9 times out of 10, he says: “Yup, do it ...we’ll find a way.” Then he gets out of the way and trusts.

So tonight, we sheep give thanks for these years of blessing with this shepherd who indeed has a tender soul, who is vulnerable, who doesn’t know it all and who understands how the strength of God is made perfect in his weakness and ours, knows all that the Lord Jesus Christ is, and tells us about it in many ways.

So let me say just one more thing. At the time of Frank’s baptism, before the Texas rector lifted the babe Frank high in the air (I know that’s where Frank got the idea of doing that), that rector said a prayer over him that went like this :

We hear it again, gratefully today as we celebrate his 20 years as our shepherd.

**“We receive this child into the congregation of Christ’s flock, and do sign him with the sign of the cross, in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ’s faithful soldier and servant unto his life’s end.”**

Our friend and rector has done that and will continue, thank God. Please rise in honor of his savior Jesus Christ and of Frank Allen, who reflects God’s love as his most humble servant.

The Rev. Alexander McCurdy III