

bEpiphany 4 ~ January 29, 2012 ~ A homily preached by The Rev'd Erl G. Purnell at Old St. Andrew's Church, Bloomfield, CT

Deuteronomy 18.15-20; Psalm 111; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 8.1-13; Mark 1.21-28

Two hundred and seventy-two years is a long time. The French & Indian War occurred 14 years after we were formally started in 1740. The independence of our nation was established 236 years ago, when St. Andrew's Church, in this Scotland District of Simsbury Town, was already 36 years old. Our Constitution was ratified in 1789 when we were already 49! At the outbreak of the War of 1812, the parish was worshipping in this very building, albeit 3 miles south off Duncaster Road. We were 72!

In the Election of 1828, when Ransom Warner was the 8<sup>th</sup> Rector, for the first time in United States' history Presidential nominations were no longer made by Congressional caucuses but by conventions and the state legislatures. John Quincy Adams was re-nominated by forces then calling themselves the National Republicans; his running mate was Secretary of the Treasury Richard Rush. The Democratic Republican opposition (soon to be simply Democratic) was posed by Andrew Jackson and his vice-presidential candidate, John C. Calhoun, who, believe it or not, had previously been vice president under Adams.

The campaign was the first true mud-slinging contest. Adams was accused of misusing public funds—he had supposedly purchased gambling devices for the presidential residence; actually he had simply bought a chessboard and a pool table. The charges against Jackson were much more malicious. He was accused of murder for executing militia deserters and dueling. Jackson won.

St. Andrew's was 88 that year and, after an absence of 21 years, it was decided to move this building back to the church's original location right here where our cemetery is.

Our 121<sup>st</sup> anniversary year was characterized by the outbreak of civil war and many of our sons enlisted and fought for more than 4 long years in that horrible carnage. Some were laid to eternal rest in our historic cemetery and their service continues to be remembered on Memorial Day every year.

When the Wrights flew in 1903, at 163, this parish was older than most Episcopal Churches in Connecticut are today. And at the armistice ending WWI on November 11, 1918 at 11 a.m., folks in these parts heard our beautiful 1,000 pound bell—given in 1891 in memory of Ransom Warner's

widow, Caroline Phelps Warner—celebrate the end of the war to end all wars.

The beat went on in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century even though St. Andrew's was mostly a summer church under the tutelage of Vicar Raymond Cunningham, who was also Rector at Trinity Church, Sigourney Street in Hartford. After WWII, recently returned veterans and their families re-kindled the fires at St. Andrew's parish. Accordingly, and for the princely sum of \$1,250, an oil furnace was installed in the basement of the church—its bones are still there!—and fired up for the first time on Easter Sunday 1949, 142 years since the building had been built and 9 years following our bi-centennial.

The Rev'd Archie Cochran—first as Vicar in 1956 and then as Rector until 1975—along with his protégé George McAdams, held the tiller of this rapidly growing parish steady for nearly 20 years. At 218 years of age in 1958, we even changed our official name to *OLD* St. Andrew's.

For much of the 1950s and '60s, St. Andrew's grew in leaps and bounds. When the first *Crier* was published in 1962, 222 years had passed beneath our bow. It was during these years that the likes of Bob and Nancy Hyatt, David and Gretchen LaBau, Carolyn and Ed Phillips arrived along with Phyl Ahrens, Dave and Jane Thornton, Margaret Spencer, Lois Parrish, Blair Wormer, Florence Seymour, Don Austin, Ev and Clair Clark, Bob and Meta Hubbard, Pat and Dick Trub, Bill and Daisy Scott to name a few. The church school, under the able and dedicated leadership of Bob Trask, boasted 127 children in 1968.

OSA was 229 when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the moon, 251 when the first Gulf War was fought, and now we're 272 years ... *young*. I often remark when speaking about the longevity of Old St. Andrew's, that we've been around for 1/8<sup>th</sup> of the time since Jesus walked the earth. That's pretty noteworthy.

Why this long litany about our history? Well, to know where to go, it's important to know where we've come from. As Isaiah so aptly puts it, "*Look to the pit from which you've come and the hole from which you're digged.*"

In these 272 years, we've flourished in good times and struggled through lean days. Our very existence has been threatened more than once—a mere 20 families were members in 1851 and, in a desperate act in 1860, Trinity, Tariffville got the Connecticut State legislature to approve their taking over St. Andrew's parish, an action that, fortunately, was reversed in 1862—; we've had great fun—like staging a comedy play, *The Rivals*, in 1894—; met challenges—at year's end 1963, the total bank balance was just over

\$1,000—; been very mission oriented—sponsoring Irish teens here in Connecticut during the troubles in Ireland in the 1980s and more recently supporting École le Bon Samaritain in Haiti—; held strawberry festivals, auctions, musical fund raisers, ABC sales, plant sales and Bazaars. These days we boast extraordinary music every week and a fantastic adult education program. Our church school is growing...slowly. Mostly, we've been blessed by exceptional leadership, both lay and ordained.

One of my jobs here—one I enjoy tremendously—is cheerleader. I like telling you how you're doing ... that you're doing great! I also take seriously my role as truth-teller. When I see things that we can do better or that are important to our spirit-lives, I always need to speak up. That's why I don't shy away from asking you to put OSA in your Wills and to increase your pledges as best you can. It's also why I admonish the vestry to invest in the upkeep of our facilities. When I think we—individually or collectively—overlook our responsibility as the Body of Christ, I want you to know. That's why I stress the importance of compassion, forgiveness, justice and love. It's the small things—things that show consideration of others, working for the wellbeing of the entire community not just the self, caring for and about our children and seniors—that matter.

Some examples: Gwen Findlay and Shirley Greiman stepping up to make our fellowship so excellent; Andy Hall taking Vivian Scott in his arms when she was so wiggly the other week; Elaine Dorer sitting with Antoinette Mason and helping her to communion; Rich Malley and Ellen and Mark Swayne bringing John Smith to church on Sundays; Cemeterian Bob Stanwood tweaking computers and other things; Shirley Murtha watering the plants in the parish hall each week; Joann Cown and Pat Penney helping with office chores; Gretchen LaBau, Peggy Stanwood and crew caring for our gardens. In addition, the vestry is terrific, as are the altar guild, ECW, and church school teachers. You see what I mean, don't you?

My talk this morning is all about who we've been, who we are, and, of course, who it is we can be. I continue to say, *'It's not about believing in Jesus; it's about believing Jesus and living into his call for us to BE the Body of Christ in this wonderful and broken world.'*

Blessings, love and peace to each of you and all of you.

*Amen.*

Some data from Wikipedia.com

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