

The Rt. Rev. Andrew D. Smith  
January 31, 2010  
Christ Church Cathedral, Hartford, CT

This is the final day for me to serve as Bishop of Connecticut, and the final day to serve as your bishop in this Cathedral, and I think it is a piece of grace for me that we can worship together this last morning. I am also very aware that it is near the last day for Allison St. Louis to serve as a priest in this diocese and as Canon Vicar of the Cathedral.

What to say and how to leave the office and place in this congregation in which I have been so blessed these more than ten years?

The gospel this morning from Luke is about how Jesus left the congregation where he had been raised.

Luke 4:21 He was in the congregation on the Sabbath and after he read from Isaiah that God had appointed a prophet to announce the new reign, he then implied that he himself was that prophet as he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." At first all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth, because they said, "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

Then he said to them, "Next you will say, 'Do the things here in your hometown that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet ever is accepted in the prophet's hometown.

And to back it up, he said, In the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land there were many widows in Israel; yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but to a widow outside of Israel at Zarephath in Sidon. Also in the time of the prophet Elisha, there were many lepers in Israel and none of them was cleansed -- only the Syrian general Naaman."

When they realized what he was saying, what he implied, all in the congregation was filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the synagogue, out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which Nazareth was built, to hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and escaped.

That's one difficult way to leave a congregation: is there any record that Jesus ever came back again?

I pray that my leaving as your bishop today, and Allison's leaving next Sunday(?) as your Canon Vicar will be different -- an opportunity for thanksgiving, some reflection, prayer -- celebration leading by grace both to affirmation and renewal.

**Thanksgiving:** my thanksgiving for the witness of this Cathedral Church, here on this corner in this city, here in the center of our diocese.

Thanksgiving for hospitality, home, refuge. I know what a home this cathedral is for our members, I have seen hospitality and ministry given to the visitor the stranger the homeless, I have been blessed by your gracious welcome and ministry to this bishop Thanksgiving for the very character of the congregation: you: your trust, the customs of this place, the values you hold before God and for the world.

I name your Dean especially here. Mark, I thank you for your vision; Mark I thank you for your grace in the not-easy-thing-to-do of shouldering the responsibility of leading this community – while most of the governing board does not even worship here, and at times like this a bishop who does not have much involvement with the daily life of the Cathedral shows up and presides at meetings and worship and celebrations when in fact you have done the work and carried the burden. You are a genuine blessing!

Allison, this is my chance to thank you too, for your serving as vicar, pastor and shepherd of program in the Cathedral, for your thoughtful and deep service to our diocese in a variety of ways and especially in the formation and examination of candidates for ordination. Virginia Seminary has chosen wisely. Vale bene; fare well.

Thanksgiving for the congregation's unflagging dedication to mission: just in recent years -- Peter's Retreat, Diocesan events, Church Street Eats, Center for Hope, cultural events from the Cathedral and hosting the community for its events, from Hartford Stage to First Night, to the National Convention of the United Church of Christ, and now hospitality to the parish of Saint James. Your giving of scholarships, recognition of service in the Canon Jones Award, your faithfulness in support for the mission of our diocese.

Thanksgiving for the worship of God offered here: Services held to glorify God. Preaching, Outstanding music. Prayer. As the center for our diocese and our home, a worshipping place for us to gather to seek grace, and in our worshipping here, you give inspiration to our many parishes for the potential of their worship too.

These are costly things to do: to stay downtown in buildings at Church and Main, to offer the witness of Christ's presence and love, to serve the diocese, to thrive as a community and to conserve and renew these Historic (antique?) and expensive buildings.

We are not simply custodians, caretakers, of a monument, a museum; we are a congregation of providers of mission and ministry. We are the givers and the doers, joyfully and faithfully pursuing the work of God which has been entrusted to ordinary people, you and me. Christ Church Cathedral.

### **Some reflections.**

We're not in the center of a huge residential population. People have to venture from their homes to come here, and then when they do there's no huge parking lot right at the church door. And the expected throng from the residential redevelopment of downtown Hartford so far has not materialized, they have stayed buttoned up in their apartments and dorm suites and condominiums.

So we are a relatively modest-sized congregation as big churches go. Yet we do so much, so very much, for God and for others – which is what the Church is all about: God's People, on Mission.

**Mission:** I believe that the Church is not here for us; it is here for the worship of God and for the blessing of others. The Church is the middleperson between God and the world, bringing each one to the other.

The social mission for which the Cathedral has been (quietly) known for years now is in full, new swing; I think especially of Church Street Eats, moving into a three-day weekend ministry, essential to others and an inspiration to the many parishes and other congregations as they come at your invitation to worship here and assist in the mission at Church Street Eats.

Evangelism: we have to learn more clearly what it means for us as Episcopalians and how to do it, how best to do it, in this context and in this time. How do we reach into the office buildings around us so that workers know that here God is in their midst and cares for them? How do we get beyond the locked doors of condominiums and student housing to offer the love and life of Christ? How do we address the city to promote the values of true commonwealth and equitable prosperity? How do we get into the halls and hearings of the Capitol to stand for the values which we know God intends for all people and the environment and for peace?

In mission our focus on Sundays is on not on ourselves, “what is for me here?”, but on God, yes and certainly, and because of God's love for us, on others, looking for the visitor, the stranger, the homeless person, whoever God brings to these doors or places in our neighborhood. God's People, on Mission

**Stewardship** we've come a long way from the days when personal sacrificial giving was dismissed as something members of the Cathedral could never do. Both the budget and the capital expenses of being the Cathedral have stretched all of us. Good! Christian living is not membership in a society or club; it is a life that requires deep commitment because we live for One who gave total commitment, his life his all.

Truth is, the future mission and life of the Cathedral depend as much on our generosity and eagerness in giving as it does on our attendance, our participation in leadership and our prayer. Don't let the endowment here – the largest, I believe, of any body in the diocese, including the diocese itself – do not let the endowment depress our giving. The buildings alone will eat up whatever the endowment produces. Rather, imagine what could happen for Christ with the endowment and our personal giving combined! Imagine!

There is lots to learn for the whole Church about Christian giving and generosity, in Scripture and especially in the life of Jesus, and that lies ahead of us. Our culture prompts us to work for ourselves; Jesus calls us to sacrifice for others. We have a way yet to go, certainly. But we are on the move. Don't stop now!

**Youth:** Shall Christ Church Cathedral be a parish that will discern a call to dedicate itself to youth? Young members of the Cathedral, I thank God for your presence here, especially you in the Cathedral choir program.

What if our pews were filled with kids? What would that take? Would it even be possible? We have dedicated resources of this place for youth, especially in scholarships. What if every young person here invited a friend to come along with you, or adults inviting friends or neighbors? Can you see the pews filled with kids? Just a thought. But imagine....

### **The future.**

We who have been together for these five, ten years, several of us now are about to explore life in Christ in new ways. Allison. Me.

God is present always. You know that. And it is we who in God's word and spirit, and in sacrament are meant to be built up into a holy temple, living stones, the Body of Christ, to witness to and serve him in this place.

It does take leadership and vision, of every living stone, serving together. Like Jeremiah, you have been known and consecrated, and appointed a prophet to the world, and don't say, I don't know how to speak for I am only a child in the faith, for you shall go to all to whom God sends you, and you shall speak what God commands you to speak – without fear – for the Lord is with you to deliver you.

Like Paul, you have come to know and live love in God.

Which is the greatest gift – more than tongues or prophecy or wisdom or charity, and is greater in power even than death. With all the spiritual gifts and more, without love we're no more than just bothersome noise. All the other gifts we practice partially here on earth, and they will disappear at the Day of the Lord. In that day, three gifts, virtues will be left: faith, hope, and love. These three are permanent; trust and live in them.

In everything, seek out Jesus. Be open to the truth. The Nazareth congregation in today's Gospel, wasn't open for the truth that was not pleasing to them. For truly as Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians, on earth we can see the mystery of God only in part, as if in a cloudy mirror. So first and continually, seek to learn Jesus, what Jesus said, how he chose to live, and then take it to heart -- believe -- what he says and so we can grow, change our lives, emulate more and more how he lives.

And, like Jesus, speak the truth to one another, inside the congregation and outside to the world and so stand for Jesus and with him in the face of all powers, secular or religious, that only seek their own good, so as to glorify God's name above all else. And the God of peace will be with you. To our God be glory forever and ever. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Always. Amen.