

**ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA, NY**

The Rev. Fr. Arthur W. Ward Jr. + Rector

Scripture: Jer. 29:11; Eph. 4:1-7

***"Building on the Foundation"(part 1)***

**A NEW YEAR AND NEW DECADE**

Happy New Year and a Happy New Decade! It's hard to believe it has been ten years since we began the new millennium – I know there are those who say the decade is really over next year, but the fact is the world is commemorating the end of the decade of single digits.

Whenever we enter a new year or new decade it should be time for reflection not only to look back but also to look forward. In yesterday's *Buffalo News* on the front page there was an article listing the top ten events of the past decade courtesy of *Newsweek*. Let me quickly read them – see if you can sense a recurring theme?

1) Terrorist attack - 9/11/01 2) Supreme Court Bush-Gore decision - 12/12/00 3) Obama elected president - 11/4/08 4) Hurricane Katrina - 8/29/05 5) Lehman Brothers goes bankrupt - 9/15/08; 6) Operation Anaconda escalates the war in Afghanistan - 3/01/02; 7) At the UN, Colin Powell makes case for war in Iraq - 2/05/03; 8) massacre at VA Tech - 4/16/07; 9) Indian Ocean tsunami - 12/26/04; 10) First licensed gay marriage in US - 2/12/04.

What's common about most of it? It's mostly bad news. Isn't amazing how the world seems to focus on the negative? Even the top ten 2009 stories for WNY and the nation listed the day before on the front page of the *Buffalo News* on Jan. 1st were for the most part negative. In fact, they all were except for the "Miracle on the Hudson" and that was listed as number ten in the national list.

Do you know why I believe people seem to focus on the negative? Outside of the Lord Jesus Christ, where is there really hope for our world? If you don't know who holds the future, how can you really be upbeat or positive? And one of the ways I think people try to control the negative is to name it and try to catalogue it. Certainly, it has been proven that bad news is a better seller than good news.

But how different it should be for those who know the Lord. We have much to be upbeat about. His word is filled with hope and promises like **Jeremiah 29:11**. Given to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, the Lord says to them through the prophet Jeremiah: " ***For I know the plans I have for you,*** declares the LORD, ***plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.***"

**A LOOK BACK**

Now when I look back the last ten years, indeed the last 54 years of St. Bartholomew's history, that Scripture certainly rings true. Sure it is important to acknowledge the sad and challenging events from one's past. During the last decade of St. Bart's the greatest tragedy was losing Fr. Tom Jones on the day after Christmas back in 2003. It didn't help that less than two years later we also lost our junior

warden Bruce Brock to complications from hernia surgery. And then of course, there was that fiasco ridden entity known as the Episcopal Church – we were threatened and harassed by our then diocesan bishop Michael Garrison in the middle of the decade and eventually had to leave our former church building and property but can anyone argue that the Lord didn't turn such a predicament around for good!? That's what happens when you follow the Lord. He turns despair into hopefulness, sadness into joy, tragedy into triumph. That's what the Bible teaches.

So when I look back at the last ten years I see a whole lot more positives than negatives. I see the arrival of Fr. Hubbard in 2001, and the development of new lay ministries during his four years with us. I see increased attendance from 412 in 1999 to over 500 in 2005 and maintaining that mark of attendance during a tough transition period. I see the ordinations of Deacons Ed Kusmierczyk and John Reitz despite threats from a hostile diocese. I see the hiring of Fr. Commins and the return of Fr. Molison. I see the return of Terry Gamble and the transformation of our music ministry with not just one choir but three. I see the development of *Immanuel*, who at first were a bunch of high schoolers learning to play the guitar, but who are now a full-fledged contemporary Christian music band with their own songs and a recently released CD. I see a thriving Christian Education Ministry under the leadership of Marilyn Commins and the great job Gary Wisniewski has done with the Adult Sunday School ministry and Crown Financial Group. I see successful women and men's fellowship groups, a prayer room, the young adults group known as the Upper Room. I see three men looking to enter Holy Orders - Jacob Bush, Gary Wisniewski, and Patrick White. I see a vibrant new Anglican Church, and the blessing of being under a godly bishop, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Bill Atwood. I see the members of our parish coming together and sharing each other's gifts as we seek to do the work of the Lord. I see people gathering after all three services for refreshments and fellowship. I see the rainbow over our new place last August after a rainstorm. I see beautiful new windows in the sanctuary. I see St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church – praise God!

Do you see what happens when you focus on the positive? It builds your faith. It helps keep things in perspective, and it helps you move forward. One of the things I believe that is important in life is what I like to call momentum. You can see it most quickly in a game like football or hockey, when things start going right for a team and they just keep building on it (like the Sabres coming back from 3 goal deficits the last two games) or conversely when things are going wrong and everything falls apart and it seems like nothing can go right (like this year's Buffalo Bills!).

### **IT'S ALL ABOUT MOMENTUM**

As Christians, when you're on the Lord's side once, you'll soon be finding yourself with His positive momentum, and if you keep doing the things you are supposed to be doing, you will be unstoppable. Why? Because you have the greatest power source backing you up. Jesus said, *"If you have the faith the size of a mustard seed you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you."* (Mt. 17:20)

Of course, you can stop the momentum by falling back into the old ways of the flesh. I mean do you remember what the Lord said in **Numbers 14:18**? *"The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in*

*lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations."*

Why? There was negative momentum that no one bothered reversing. I am sure some try but unless you give it to the Lord and ask Him to overcome whatever it is that is bringing you down, it will be fruitless. Only the Lord can turn things around.

And He has for us, hasn't He? He has for St. Bartholomew's, hasn't He? Every step of the way. Why? We didn't lose the momentum – we kept pressing on, we kept persevering, we kept looking forward.

And that is what we are going to keep doing this next year and this next decade.

### **LET US ARISE AND BUILD**

I have entitled this new sermon series “Building on the Foundation” because that is what we are going to be doing during this coming year and decade. Now last year on the first Sunday of the new year, I gave a sermon entitled, “*Let Us Arise and Build.*” Later in the year it served as the theme for our three year mission initiative. Now when I addressed the congregation that day, we had only been in our new church home for a couple of weeks. And yet, we all recognized how good the Lord had been to us, by seeing us through from leaving our old church building and moving into a new one. I had us look at **Nehemiah 2**, to see how God's people responded in a similar situation. They sought to rebuild Jerusalem. They responded to Nehemiah's call with the words, “*Let Us Arise and Build!*” We too, now had a similar opportunity. In fact, I mentioned three things we needed to build: 1) Our Christian Witness 2) Our Anglican Identity 3) Our Building and Property. I didn't say how exactly, but I laid out the big picture so to speak.

We got into a little more detail months later with the actual “*Let Us Arise and Build*” three year mission initiative. Now if you recall the *Let Us Arise and Build* mission initiative was to build a foundation so that we could be a more effective Christian and Anglican witness. Every member was called to be in a state of prayer and reflection in order to discern what role they would play in the mission initiative. A big part of it was looking at the financial needs of the parish, and specifically how they pertained to the renovations and improvements needed to transform this once Jewish Synagogue into a Christian and Anglican Church. And you responded generously and faithfully. Not only was about \$750,000 committed over the next three years but over 10% of that amount has already been given!

But now that financial and building needs are being met, we need to look at how can we make our ministry here at St. Bartholomew's a more effective one. In other words, what about the actual ministry itself? If we are going to be the light of Christ and the salt of the earth we need to know who we are, what is our mission, and how we are going to implement the mission.

Now in many respects we are doing just that – but the truth is we can always improve. God's goal is that we reach our potential. My goal as your priest and rector is to help the members of our church

family to reach their potential, and in so doing helping the entire St. Bart's church family reach its potential. That's my mission. I will talk more about reaching our potential as individuals next week but first I want us to look at the biblical basis for our mission. Recall that the mission statement of St. Bartholomew's is "to proclaim the truth and love of the Lord Jesus Christ in word and deed by the power of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God the Father," while the purpose of the parish is "to be a Christ-centered and Bible-believing Anglican Church committed to the Great Commission." Now where do we find the foundation for such a mission and purpose in the Word of God? We find it in Ephesians chapter 4.

### **THE CHURCH'S MISSION AND PURPOSE – Eph. 4**

If there is one chapter that sums the mission and purpose of the church it is this one. Please turn with me now to **Ephesians 4** in your pew Bibles. We will only be looking at **verses 1-14** today.

*<sup>1</sup>Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love...Notice St. Paul begins with our attitude. That is the starting point in our walks with God toward others. We are to have attitudes of humility and patience. We are called to love and this means showing tolerance and forbearance with others. Paul continues, "<sup>3</sup>being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* If there is going to be unity then we need to know who we are in Christ, what we believe and what is our mission in life. The foundation and basis for our unity and mission is provided here:

*<sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. <sup>7</sup>But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

In other words, our faith and our God is one! There is one body of believers the world over despite denominational differences. Everyone who professes Jesus is Lord and believes the Bible to be God's Word are members of this body. There is one Holy Spirit not many spirits to whom we serve and worship. There is one hope, which is a reference to the union the whole body of Christ will have with Christ after His return when He establishes His reign and rule for all eternity. There is only one Lord! Christ is the one and only Lord to whom we serve and worship. Recall **Philippians 4:10-11** which tells us that one day every knee will bend and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

Moreover, there is only one true faith and you only have to be baptized once to be a member of Christ's Church. We don't have to be reinitiated into the body of Christ even if we fall away. And finally, there is one God and Father who ultimately is above all things- whether visible or invisible. This is the foundation for our faith. Next week, we will look further into this chapter to see how God has given us the leadership gifts to build His Church. Let us pray...