

**Epiphany VI (RCL/B)**  
**February 15, 2009**  
*First Sermon...*

**St. Margaret's**  
**Annapolis**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. *Amen.*

I looked at today's lessons several weeks ago, shortly after your vestry and I had agreed that I would come and be your interim rector, and that today would be my first Sunday with you. And I remember thinking, "O, Lord! Lepers!" Skin problems and their healing seem to be the theme of the day.

If we were not a tradition that uses the lectionary for our Sunday readings... if I had had a choice about the readings... I'd have chosen the Old Testament story of Abraham and Sarah, who left the familiar place they knew and struck out for a foreign land.

Now, Annapolis is anything but foreign. But it is for us, for my husband Bill and for me, a new land, and new place, full of promise and adventure. The place we left is and always will be populated by memories and friends. But we know that when we leave this place, it too will be full of new memories and new friends.

Because I am here as your interim rector, we don't have time to waste. So let's get right to it.

Let me begin by telling you that I almost always preach on the gospel, or sometimes one of the other lessons for the day. Today, however, is different. Today is for something more like introductions. So I'm going to begin by telling you something about my story.

You will learn that I am a lover of words. And one of my favorite books is [A Short Etymology of the English Language](#). When I looked up the word *story*, it led me to the word *history*. Of course, I thought, when I read the origins of those words. It is about narrative; about where we've been and who we are. And that's how we come to know each other: by sharing some part of our stories.

But this, at least not here from the pulpit, isn't about my autobiography. I'll be happy to tell you more about those kinds of details in some other forum. For now, let me tell you this: I come to you from a parish in a small town that likes to think of itself as a little city, LaGrange, Georgia. The church I have served for the last thirteen years is the only Episcopal church in town, St. Mark's. I loved my time there and treasure the experiences and the relationships we had there.

I sensed, though, that God might also bless us and bless my ministry in a new place. Skipping the details, that turned out to be St. Margaret's, a call Bill and I had decided several months ago to accept if it was offered to me. So when the offer was extended, I already knew our answer.

There have been extenuating circumstances, though, about which you should know: that between those early conversations and my acceptance, my Bill went into the hospital for a scheduled surgery that was supposed to require a week's stay. That was three months ago next Wednesday, and he is still there. After a series of complications, after having started in one hospital and being transferred to another, after nine surgeries and a tenth still to go, he is actually doing amazingly well. We both know that that is entirely due to innumerable and continued prayers. And now we are counting on yours as well.

To know me, to know us, you'll have to understand that leaving him was the hardest thing I've ever done. Doing it anyway is an indication of our belief in the rightness of this move. I will, of course, be with him

for his next and most-hopefully-last surgery the first week of March, after which he'll be kept there for recovery for another month. Then I will go and bring him to our new home.

I am most grateful to the vestry and wardens, and particularly to Stewart, who have all assured me of their support during all this. What I know that they don't, is how much you are going to love and enjoy my Bill when I get him here.

So that is part of my story. There is more, of course, and we will come to know each other in the months ahead. And we will never be entirely the same again, because our stories will forever be intertwined. That's the thing about stories. Once they come together, they are forever interwoven.

There's a little book by Mitch Albom called The Five People You'll Meet in Heaven. You may remember him as the author of Tuesdays with Maurie. The central character in this story about heaven is Eddie; a man who has spent his whole life repairing the rides in a seaside amusement park. He thinks bitterly of his life as a meaningless waste.

On his 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday he is working as usual... when one of the high rides suddenly lurches and jams. As one of the carts begins to fall with deadly speed, Eddie jumps to save a little girl in its path. He feels her hands... then nothing.

When he wakes up, he's in heaven. But it is nothing like the Garden of Eden he expected. As the story unfolds, he meets five people, all of whose lives intersected with his in some deeply significant way, even though he doesn't recognize or remember some of them.

At the very end of the book, here is the last part of the last line: **THERE ARE MANY STORIES, BUT ALL THE STORIES ARE ONE.**

There are many stories, but all the stories are one. My story and your stories are already bound together, not just because our lives have now intersected, but because we are all children of God; all part of the same family, whether we previously recognized it or not.

For now, it enough just to know that. The actual telling of our stories will be part of the joy of this year together. I am thankful to be here. I am grateful for your warm welcome. If I didn't know better, and if it wasn't for the weather, I'd even call it a Southern welcome!

May God bless our time together. May God bless your stories and mine.

Amen.

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