

**Sermon for the  
Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Temple [transferred]  
Sunday, 5 February 2012**

**In loving memory of  
The Rev. John S. Staley  
1937-2011**

**GOD WANTS TO KNOW:** After the surgery on my right hand last October I received several many medical forms to fill out to evaluate various aspects of my medical care: one for my primary care physician, another on his office; others about the surgeon and his office; the hematology lab, the ex-ray unit, the physical therapy center; and even one for the entire hospital, including the staff at the reception desk and signage.

The only one I enjoyed came was a tongue-in-cheek form sent from a friend on a post card that included her get well greetings. It was an evaluation of God:

God Wants to Know

*God would like to thank you for your belief and patronage. In order to better serve your needs, [God] asks that you take a few moments to answer the following questions. Please keep in mind that your responses will be kept completely confidential and that you need not disclose your name or address unless you desire a direct response to your comments or suggestions.*

1. How did you find out about God?

- |                |                     |
|----------------|---------------------|
| *newspaper     | *internet           |
| *television    | *divine inspiration |
| *word of mouth | *other _____        |

2. Are you currently using any other sources of inspiration, security, or guidance in addition to God? Please check all that apply:

- |                  |                    |                 |
|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| *none            | *biorhythms        | *sex            |
| *tarot           | *insurance polices | *alcohol        |
| *fortune cookies | *lottery           | *advice columns |
| *horoscopes      | *self-help books   | *other _____    |

3. God generally employs a limited amount of divine intervention in order to keep a good balance between felt presence and blind faith. Would you prefer (circle one):

- A. more divine intervention
- B. less divine intervention
- C. current level of divine intervention just right
- D. don't know

4. God also attempts to maintain a fairly balanced level of disasters and miracles to achieve his purposes. Please rate on a scale of 1-5 his handling of the following: a. disaster [flood, famine, war]

b. miracle [recovery from disease, heroic rescues, sports upsets]

1. unsatisfactory 2. poor 3. average 4. good 5. excellent

5. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions for improving the quality of God's services?
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*Thank you.*

I won't reveal how I evaluated God about the surgery and my recovery. But were I use this same form in evaluating our life as a parish during 2011 I'd respond as follows:

**PRESENTATION:** However we first found out about God, we learned a lot more in the rhythm of worshipping and ministering together. So given the available options I'd check *word of mouth* and *divine inspiration*; as well as *other*, adding all the ways we present ourselves and each other to God in our temple called All Saints', much like Mary and Joseph presented Jesus to God in the temple in Jerusalem.

In the "Dedication" of a collection of poems appropriately titled *The Temple*, the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Anglican poet, George Herbert, eloquently describes the perpetual presentation that creates the heart beat of who we are and what we do at our best:

Lord, my first fruits present themselves to thee;  
Yet not mine neither: for from thee they came  
And must return. Accept of them and me,  
And make us strive, who shall best sing thy name.

So please read the many accounts emailed to you in the Annual Report for narratives of how we present ourselves and each other to God:

- Parish Deacon
- Senior and Junior Wardens
- Treasurer
- Stewardship Officer
- Haight Ashbury Community Services neighborhood food program
- Music ministry
- Verger
- Administrative Assistant
- Sacristan, Usher, and Acolyte
- Christian Education
- Parish Retreat
- Memorial Fund
- Eldercare Nursing Home
- Legacy program.

**WISHFUL THINKING:** About the "sources of inspiration, security or guidance," I guess, to be honest, I'd have to add a category of "most of the above." Not just because I'm all too well aware as your pastor all the things you and I do to keep ourselves sane in a mad world; but also because I wouldn't want to exclude fortune cookies. After all, 38 years ago this month, after dinner at the Peking Express, in Princeton Junction, New Jersey, on our second date, John pulled out this fortune from his cookie: "You will soon meet someone as gay as you are"!

Still, of all of the options offered here, I'd check only *other*, which could be just a case of wishful thinking. But wishful we are. Especially when it comes to celebrating how generous the members and friends of All Saints' are in giving of your time, talent and treasure to the many ways we present ourselves to God and each other.

Yes, in the economic downturn we are all experiencing, we can feel anxious about how a parish the size of All Saints' can financially continue doing what we do. How often the Vestry and officers of the parish, the trustees of the parish endowment, and you and me must pray at night like the man kneeling at his bedside in a cartoon from *The New Yorker* from last April: "*Perhaps if you gave me one big lump sum of cash, I wouldn't have to keep asking for small amounts all the time.*"

Yet because of your generosity we are doing well:

- Even though the number of pledgers has decreased, the total amount of pledged income has increased.
- Because of a substantial bequest to the parish endowment, the loan we took from our endowment to pay for the increasing costs of the renovation of the front of the church almost a decade ago has finally been paid back in full.
- Members and friends of All Saints' contributed close to \$25,000 to our year end Christmas Appeal, with gifts ranging from \$25.00-\$5,000 to our operating expenses, our neighborhood food program, the endowment, liturgy needs, building maintenance and improvements, and, yes, even the Rector's Discretionary Fund.
- and there's even more: a. last January 10 members made it possible for All Saints' to provide for two pews at the newly renovated chapel at San Francisco General Hospital; and b. just this past month 10 members of All Saints' attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Awards Luncheon for Episcopal Community Services, making it possible for us to purchase a whole table, which got us listed on the front cover of the program as a *Friend*. Not a *Supporter*: that honor went to KRON Channel 4, Turner Newton, and CPMC Sutter Health. Not a *Contributor*: that honor went to Hood & Strong, Caritas, and Diane Wilsey. Still, right under Dede's name, at the top of the list of Friends, there we were: All Saints' Episcopal Church, San Francisco. The only church in the whole diocese which contributed and attended as a parish. Wow, was I proud of you!

**DIVINE INTERVENTION:** Because so much of our wishful thinking is fulfilled, I think that when we get to evaluating the amount of divine intervention we'd prefer, we'd circle *current level of divine intervention just right*. Maybe you want more. But I'm happy just now for the divine intervention we've already been given.

Some examples that give me great satisfaction, and I hope they satisfy you too:

- the initiatives we made in evangelism and outreach by hosting a booth at the Cole Valley Street Fair, offering hospitality to the Victorian Alliance for its tour of the Haight and Cole Valley, and providing the venue for the MTA's Traffic calming program;

- The weekly neighborhood use of our building: several 12 step programs, a children's music program, the Urban School's fencing class, a local unit of a national karate organization, and a spiritual formation class of the School for Deacons, and a place for two therapists to meet with their clients;
- And when the Bishop made his every-other-year visitation to All Saints' in the Spring, we presented to him *Jeffrey Russell* for baptism; *David Horsfield*, *Elizabeth Matter*, and *Carrie Sloan* for confirmation; *Doreen Emery* and *William Whitefield* for reaffirmation of faith; *Collette Hughes* for reception; and *Seth St. Martin*, welcomed as a member of All Saints'.

And that is only part of the story. To the *living* I've already mentioned, let me give thanks for the divine intervention we were blessed with over the years by those *who died*.

- Two people who died in 2010 were interred in our Columbarium in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd in January 2011: *Ralph Wooton*, whose bequest allowed us to close our debt to the Memorial Fund; and *Ernie Mayorga*, who served as an usher, offering at the front door of the Church on Sunday mornings hospitality to members, friends, and visitors alike.
- *Oberia Woodford*, who volunteered daily at the Bay View mission of Grace Cathedral in distributing food and clothes to the very needy.
- *Ralph Wentworth*, who once sent a challenge grant to the entire congregation, committing himself to a 10% increase in his yearly pledge after he learned we were considering starting the New Year with an unbalanced budget.
- *John Staley*, priest and pastor, who served as a pastoral associate at All Saints' for 35 years, celebrating and preaching regularly at the 8:00 Mass, with a style and demeanor that showed why he had become such a successful priestly presence in the Tenderloin where he worked with many rehab organizations, including St. Anthony's Foundation.

**MIRACLES:** Now about rating God on his handling of disasters and miracles: I'll focus on the miracles, and rather than looking back to 2011, I'll look ahead to 2012. And I needn't say much about the two miracles I hope to give an *excellent* to rating because oral reports will be given at the Annual Meeting following Mass.

One is a progress report on a *Legacy program* at All Saints', which we inaugurated at the annual meeting last year and have spent a whole year planning. Sometimes called "Planned Giving" a legacy program is how we provide for those who will follow us 10, 25, 50, 100 years down the road, the way our predecessors provided for us 100, 50, 25, and 10 years ago.

The other is the *Nets for Life* initiative which we will inaugurate this coming Lent to participate in the national Episcopal Church's Millennium Development Goals program sponsored by Episcopal Relief and Development. We have been sponsors of ERD endeavors before, responding to relief efforts in New York City after 9/11, a decade ago, and to Haiti, after the earthquake, two years ago. Now we have the opportunity through prayer, study, and financial contributions to provide nets for countries in sub-Saharan Africa for the eradication of malaria.

To be honest, I have a personal interest in both programs. Having reached a *certain* age, John and I need to give more careful attention to what we have and where we want it to go after we die. Also, I am a *survivor of malaria*, which I contracted the first of the two summers I worked in Haiti in a medical clinic as a college student. I am only alive today because of the dramatic rescue by a helicopter sent from Port-au-Prince to the remote area on the southern peninsula where I was stationed. So, in case you are wondering: even before our Nets for Life campaign has started, John and I are contributing 10 nets in thanksgiving that I was still around a decade later to be the *somebody as gay as he was whom he would soon meet*.

Now that I am back to fortune cookies, let me conclude by saying what I really think we really need to consider in evaluating our worship and ministry at All Saints', whatever year we are looking at: Gratitude.

**GRATITUDE:** So if I were to *have any additional comments or suggestions for improving the quality of God's services* I'd write, let us be more grateful. As Christians, we all know gratitude is good for soul. What perhaps you didn't know is that according to recent psychological studies, gratitude is good for a lot more: better health, sounder sleep, less anxiety and depression, higher satisfaction with life, kinder behavior toward others, including romantic partners!

But there's a rub. According to those same psychological studies, most of us most of the time do not feel particularly grateful. So what to do? Here's some suggestions from a book on gratitude I recently browsed through:

- *Start with "gratitude light":* keep a journal listing once a week five things for which you feel grateful: a friend's generosity, something you've learned, a sunset you enjoyed.
- *Don't confuse gratitude with indebtedness:* in your journal exclude all the ways you feel guilty for what you haven't done and give thanks for what you have done.
- *Try it on your family:* Do one small and unobtrusive thing for each member of your family, even the ones you don't like.
- *Contemplate a higher power:* "religious individuals don't necessarily act with more gratitude in a specific situation, but thinking about religion can cause people to feel and act more generously."
- *Go for deep gratitude:* "Once you've learned to count your blessings, think bigger. . . As a culture we have lost a deep sense of gratefulness about the freedoms we enjoy, . . . for the material advantages we have . . . [our] focus should be a reflection of how our lives have been made so much more comfortable by the sacrifices of those who have come before us."

And "Going for deep gratitude" is what we can be all about at All Saints,' especially on the Feast of the Presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ in Temple when we hold our Annual Meeting. The principal reason we present ourselves to God and each other when we worship and minister

together is our hope that what became true for the Christ child in his presentation in the temple will become true for all of us here at All Saints:

*May we grow and become strong, filled with wisdom;  
so that the favor of God will be upon us.*

AMEN

*Kenneth L. Schmidt, Rector*

A post-script to my report:

I am happy to announce that at the Annual Meeting after Mass on Sunday, I appointed *John Prescott* as Senior Warden and that at the vestry meeting after the Annual Meeting:

- The Vestry elected the following officers: *Margaret Taylor*, Junior Warden; *Mark Patterson*, Treasurer; *Jean McMaster*, Stewardship Officer; and *Rhonda Lee*, Clerk;
- Also, the Vestry unanimously accepted the recommendation of the Search Committee for Minister of Music to offer the position of Minister of Music to *William Visscher*, the Interim Minister of Music, with thanks to the members of the Search Committee: *Larry Hilty*, *Margaret Taylor*, *Jean McMaster*, *Susan St. Martin*, *Sheppard Kominars*, and me.

The next day, on behalf of the vestry, I offered the position to Bill and he happily accepted. Bill and I set the date for his commissioning on Sunday, 19 February, the Last Sunday after the Epiphany [the Transfiguration], at the 10:00 Mass. I hope you can attend to celebrate Bill's new ministry with us. *Welcome, Bill!*