

LET LIGHT SHINE OUT OF DARKNESS; 2CORINTHIANS 4:5-12; JUNE 10, 2018; ANNUAL MEETING; THOMAS H. YORTY; WESTMINSTER CHURCH

My mentor David McFarlane preached on this text years ago. The title of his sermon was "Duncan's" the name of a Taconic Parkway diner just north of Dutchess County.

David and his family were on their way for summer vacation and stopped at Duncan's for lunch. Inside was a classic 1950s American diner. They sat down. A waiter came and took orders and then a young man with obvious physical and learning disabilities brought them water and bread.

David watched as the young man went around the room filling water glasses and clearing dishes. There was something about him as he interacted with customers bringing smiles to their faces; grace and warmth, but also a simple joy in giving, in being of help and service.

It occurred to David that the young man with such a good nature who brought out the good nature of others was no small reason the place was filled with locals. There was a palpable gentleness and humanity in the room of that parkway diner.

David mused that's what St. Paul meant when he wrote that we are earthen vessels through whom light shines. Each one of us is broken in some way, incomplete. Maybe it's a physical limitation or some emotional Achilles heel, a blind spot or phobia.

The remarkable thing about being the church is that God uses us anyway to let light shine out of darkness. We are not, nor do we pretend to be a perfect church. There is no such thing as a perfect church except for the church triumphant, the company of saints in heaven.

We could probably be less timid about sharing our faith; perhaps we could field more volunteers and consistently fill more pews. But at the end of the day somehow the light of God manages to sparkle through this earthen vessel called Westminster.

I believe a big reason that it does is our passion for social justice, our unwavering loyalty to one another and our goal to make this a place of welcome, a place of learning, and a community that lives by and celebrates progressive values.

By that I mean we strive for diversity and inclusion of all people regardless of socio-economic, racial, or ethnic identity or age or gender or sexual orientation. And we are theologically diverse – scattered across the spectrum from the human to the divine understanding of Jesus and God. And, it turns out we are pretty unique; a church with traditional worship, progressive values, and willing to risk rocking the boat.

It is a honor and joy to serve as pastor of this not perfect but great church. To draw upon a bench of talent that makes the Golden State Warriors look like amateurs. And to be surrounded and supported by talented, dedicated, excellent staff.

An annual meeting is a time to step back and look at the present as a continuation of the best of our past; and to look upon the ministry we are recapping today as the pathway that leads to our best future.

We are standing on the broad shoulders of our spiritual ancestors from Jesse Ketchum to Will Clarkson, Ed Bean and Holly Walsh who recently joined the church triumphant. With God's help, our shoulders will be broad enough for future generations to stand upon as they continue to make this a just and humane world. We don't have to be perfect let God's light shine through us; just willing like that young man bussing tables at Duncan's. Amen.