

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA
Second Sunday after Epiphany, Year A, January 15, 2017
The Rev. Bill Queen
“Some Things New and Some Things Neutral”

- the first home that Lynn Ellen and I purchased was a 1924 wood-frame bungalow in Jacksonville FL; it had knob and tube wiring, two window AC units, and a forced air heater in the central hallway; with the exterior walls consisting almost entirely of the original large sash windows, it was hot in summer and cold in winter; and if you tried to use the iron while the window units were on, a fuse would invariably blow; it did not even have washer or dryer hookups
- obviously, we had to do some updating; we upgraded the wiring and put in circuit breakers; we had ductwork installed for central air and heat; and once the hookups were in place we installed a washer and dryer; it was still a beautiful old house, but it was much more comfortable and convenient for our family with two small children

- the second home that Lynn Ellen and I purchased was a newly-constructed house in a zero lot-line subdivision built along a golf course in Atlantic Beach FL; since the house had not yet been built we were able to chose among six different floor plans; also the brick, roof, siding, and wall colors—from among the allowed hues; and we chose the fireplace design and the kitchen and bath cabinetry; after we moved in we wanted to make it feel more personal, so we chose to paint one long wall a deep burgundy, which made it stand out in contrast to the neutral whites and greys of the rest of the house
- but when it came time to sell that house, the realtor said we needed to paint over that burgundy wall and make it neutral like the others; she said that it would not be appealing to a buyer the way it was; she informed us that it looked too quirky and would actually distract someone from being able to seeing the house as their home; so we painted over it, which, of course, took multiple coats, since neutral colors don't cover dark burgundy easily

- I've described these two houses and the different procedures we had to undertake with them in such detail because each of those procedures illustrates an approach we need to use here at Christ and Grace during this interim time period; on the one hand it is important to look carefully at our facility, our programs, our ways of doing things and to ask ourselves: what needs updating?; what has perhaps served its purpose well in the past, but is not doing what it needs to now?; on the other hand it is important also to look carefully at our facility, our programs, our ways of

doing things and to ask ourselves: what here is a bit too out of the ordinary?; what is so quirky and unique that visitors might be put off by it?; or a priest considering applying to be your new Rector might be put off by it

- these decisions are not for me to make on my own; we all need to do these kinds of important thinking and deciding together; the hard part is that we need to be able to see ourselves the way others see us, and not just the way we are used to seeing ourselves; part of my function as Interim Rector is to be like that realtor who pointed out to me and Lynn Ellen that no matter how much we liked that burgundy wall, that others wouldn't necessarily see it with the same fondness we did; this needs to be an ongoing process that will take some time, but I've begun to identify several kinds of things that fall into one or the other of these approaches

- in the area of things that might need updating, we need to look at our communications; while we may still want to produce and mail a few copies of paper newsletters, it is easier and less costly to send out a digital newsletter; we might also put more emphasis on keeping the web page and Facebook page actively updated with what is happening each week, as these truly are the "front doors" of any church nowadays; hardly anyone will visit a church without checking them out online first; and many people may, for better or worse, make a decision not even to bother to visit a church if they don't like what they see online about it; you may have noticed that I've been simplifying the bulletin; today you'll see that all your responses are in bold print, what you are already familiar with if you attend the Celtic service; my intention is to make it more "user friendly", especially for visitors who may not be familiar with Episcopal worship and terminology; those are two examples of things that can be updated, and we will continue to look for others

- in the area of things that might need to be returned to a more neutral palette, what jumps out at me first are some elements of the worship service, especially where the liturgy has not been following the rubrics, the guidelines given in the *Book of Common Prayer*; those guidelines align our liturgy with our theology, and the danger we run into when deviating from the prayer book is that we deviate from our accepted theology

- the approach I like to use, especially in worship, for any change is to make small adjustments, being upfront by telling you what I've chosen to do differently, and explaining why I've chosen to do something differently; a lot of this is an education process; starting today I will not be using prayers and other texts from sources other than the *Book of Common Prayer*; we won't say the Collect of the Day in unison; we will not precede the Bible readings with introductions; I will invite standing or kneeling for the Prayers of the People and the Eucharistic Prayer;

we will not use Sanctus bells, which are called “Sanctus” bells because that is the normal place they are first rung; when they are rung during the Eucharistic prayer, in a practice that dates to the ancient Roman Catholic Church, they were timed to coincide with the lifting up of the bread and of the wine; since the priest celebrated with his back to the congregation and many people then did not receive communion, seeing the blessed bread and wine were the moments people did not want to miss—hence the bells ringing meant “look now or you will miss it!”; and they are a high-church practice in a service that is in all other respects low-church; again, my guide in all of these changes is to follow the explicit instructions given in the prayer book

- none of these changes are set in stone, and we may choose to bring some of them back at a later time; but I think it is important we experience them together by doing them, not just by thinking about them; I will continue to preach and offer adult education topics on these kinds of things, so we will have the opportunity to talk about them more in depth and hear how you feel about them; and I would ask that you give such changes a fair chance, by not making up your mind too quickly about whether you like them or not; a new and unfamiliar way of doing something may take a little time before it becomes familiar; but you’ll never know what it is like unless you try it

- this is a beautiful parish with many great traditions; we will work together to make it even more comfortable and convenient for our visitors and for those who may become our future members; and we will work together to revise any distractions that might alter our theology; we always want to remember that this church home of our is, first and foremost, the house of the Lord