

Sermon for Christ & Grace Church Petersburg, VA
All Saints Sunday, November 5, 2017
The Rev. Bill Queen
“We Present Ourselves to God”
Romans 12:1

I want to share two show-and-tell items with you this morning; first, an offering plate; you see this often, and you make generous use of it; you always stand as the offering plates are brought forward, and standing then is not just a custom, nor do we stand because the singing of the Doxology leads us to be standing as we would with any hymn

the special significance in standing for the presentation of the offerings is that by it we show that we all participate in the act of giving, and to recognize that all of our gifts have been gathered together and presented together; it is more than just a collection of individual gifts; it is one gift given by this church community; it is a reminder that we are all in this together—in the giving and in the ministries that flow from this giving

and today we have a special kind of giving, as I have all of the pledge cards which have been turned in so far; some may have already been carried forward in the offering plates, or been delivered by mail, or been dropped off in person; and any more that will come up in the offering plates today; this special offering is one combined gift from all of you that is meant to sustain God’s ministries carried out through this church community for an entire year to come; and we will be recognizing your commitments with a special blessing of these gifts at the altar today

today we are also looking forward to the future as we welcome two new members into Christ’s church through baptism; and we look back to the past in thanksgiving as we remember the saints who have come before us; this is a special day indeed as we recognize the importance of past, present, and future

the other show-and-tell item is a paper weight; it is a molded plaster disc; it has a splattering of green and blue paint on it, which may have been intended to represent something that I cannot recognize; perhaps those were my son Philip’s favorite colors; I know it was Philip who made this because of his name and date on it; the date tells me Philip was a month shy of being two

years old when he made this; it has been on my desk for over 20 years

I have never in my entire life needed a paperweight; its shape is too small and uneven to serve as a coaster; but what it does serve as, for me, is a physical reminder of that cute little boy at that age; of how he has changed and grown over the years; of just how proud I am to be his father and of all the memories and the connections we have formed as father and son over the years; the coaster is a representation of love; I can recall receiving so many other gifts like it that were made at other schools, in other years, by all three of our children; each one presented with a tremendous sense of pride from having made something, and from a desire to give it as a gift of love; a child's gift such as this, no matter how small, is really a gift of himself or of herself

and that's what connects these things together, the offering plate and the paperweight; you have all participated in this act of giving together to something special that will extend a long legacy of ministry in this place onward into the future; and what you have given has been given out of great love—love of God, love of God's people, and love of God's plans for this church and for this community

what you have given to the church is a lot more than money and a pledge card; you have given from all of the time and skill and energy it took you to earn that money; you have given from your desire to see God's kingdom spread through the ministries of this church community; you have given of nothing less than your selves; you've heard me use this offertory sentence over and over again, Romans 12:1: "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present yourselves as a living sacrifice;" that's what you've been doing

now I want you to picture this: when the offering plates are brought up and placed on the altar every week, and especially today when we have a year's worth of your love and hopes and dreams for God's work in this parish represented by your pledge cards also placed upon the altar, picture that you have placed yourselves upon the altar; these gifts are more than just a representation or a symbol of you; they are you; they are your sacramental offering of yourselves to God; and like everything we place upon the altar, we give our gifts to God in order that God may give them back to us, blessed

on behalf of the Vestry and of this entire parish community, thank you for

what you have given of yourselves in the past; thank you for what you are giving of yourselves now in the present; and thank you for what you have pledged to give of yourselves in the future; may we all be especially attentive today to how we continue to offer ourselves to God; and may we all be especially thankful for the ways that God is blessing each one of us