

Seventh Sunday of Easter, 5/12/2024, St. David's (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

I didn't realize that my final Sunday was going to fall on Mother's Day until the bishop brought it up. Please know that I am not trying to mess with your brunch plans. I feel especially bad for my sister Christine, who in order to be here for my final service is several states away from her two beloved daughters, as well as my brother Brit, who left his wife and three children and five grandchildren—a couple of whom they are babysitting—to be with us today for my last service. I really wanted them both here, as they were both at my very first service as an ordained deacon, as well as my first Eucharist as a priest. I couldn't imagine anything more fitting than having them here this morning.

When the bishop pointed out that May 12 was actually Mother's Day, I briefly considered that the Feast of Pentecost, which falls next Sunday, could be appropriate as a final service; but I believe Pentecost would be better as a true birthday of the larger church and rebirth of our beloved St. David's if held my first Sunday away. So I stuck with my choice of the seventh Sunday of Easter because it's a time of transition, a liminal time. Last Thursday was the Ascension, when Jesus ascended into heaven following his resurrection. We are using those readings today instead of the Seventh Sunday of Easter lections. So last Thursday, Jesus bodily ascended, and then some ten days later, on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to the disciples—and stayed.

But what about those ten days in between? They must have been a little confusing, a little chaotic. Like the period where we find ourselves now, with me saying goodbye to you, and none of us are sure what will be next.

Our collective grief about this chapter in the life of our church, of course, has been worsened by losing our beloved Deacon Emeritus Bill just one month ago. I preached about Deke last week—if you missed it, it should be posted on our website tomorrow. I vividly remember my first Sunday here, with Bill. I remember my installation as rector. It was a time of great hope for St. David's, and that hope will come again. Because as much as we loved Deke and as much as we love each other, the church is much, much bigger than its ordained clergy. On the cover of our bulletin, we list Jesus Christ as Head of the Church and right underneath are the people of St. David's, Ministers. You all are the backbone of this church, not me. I've been so honored to serve with you the past thirteen years, but priests come and go, and you will be training up a new one in no time, with Adrian letting them know that he always says an extra alleluia and David determining when the 8 AM service will begin and the kids explaining that the breaking of the bread needs to be large and dramatic and that they will sometimes be very vocal during the children's sermon and sometimes will not.

I don't know how to say good-bye to the church that has been a consuming passion for me for over thirteen years. I don't know how to hit inspiring notes when there are so many things left undone. I was determined that when I left this place, we would no longer have a large parish hall debt, but that has not happened. We still do. I regret that. I was determined that we would have processes in place that would ensure that this church could function with part-time or bivocational clergy, and while progress has been made in that area, it's not as solid as I would like it to be.

I am thrilled to leave you all with a strong vestry and two incredible wardens. When I asked Ryan and Joannie to serve in that capacity I did not know that my cancer had spread and that I was going to have to leave so soon, and I feel terrible about that. Please do all that you can to support them. Ryan will function as the ecclesiastical authority until a clergy person comes in a more permanent way. I inadvertently did something similar to Ryan's wife Dana four years ago, when I asked her to consider becoming senior warden and then realized how serious my cancer was, in the beginning of the pandemic. I worry that neither of them will ever volunteer for church positions again, which would be a horrible shame because they are both such gifted and faithful ministers.

Speaking of Dana, when I think back on the past thirteen years of ministry, hiring her as well as Connie remain two of the accomplishments I'm most grateful for. Along with Bonnie, who is the most reasonable church musician I have ever encountered, I am leaving you all with a strong, strong staff.

One of the hardest things that we've gone through together was the closing of our beloved preschool, but I take hope from that because it led to other things, such as our labyrinth, right next to some playground equipment, blurring the lines between prayer and play—which is how it should be, in my opinion. I'm thrilled by the number of babies and pregnancies and kids we still have despite not having a preschool. And not having a preschool meeting during the day opened up space for a daytime Eucharist and Bible study, which has now been going strong for six years and has been one of my biggest joys here, and I'm deeply grateful that the group has continued to meet during my absence.

Because this place is not about me. We are about God, who so loved the world that God sent Jesus. We try to make everything point to Christ here. And next week, you all will celebrate the birthday of the church, and while of course most of us grieve the ending of this pastoral relationship, that will also be a time of new beginnings. Of hope.

Please know that there are things I don't do well and whoever comes after me will likely say things along the lines of, "We all love Elizabeth, but she rarely submitted paperwork to the diocese." "We all love Elizabeth, but she didn't visit people enough." "We all love Elizabeth, but she couldn't chant worth spit." And many other things I don't even know that I don't do well.

Please, don't feel like you need to defend me. Because this place is not about me. There are things I don't do well, some of which are likely important to you, and next week's new beginning can give you hope in that. Please don't leave because I am leaving.

The main reason I wanted to hear the Ascension readings this morning instead of the Seventh Sunday of Easter was the last line of this morning's Gospel from Luke: "And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and they were continually in the temple blessing God."

Ministers of St. David's, this is what all of us are called to do during this time of transition. Yes, it's sad and hard, but we are called to continually worship and praise. Thank you for being here this morning, and please come back next Sunday, wearing red and bursting with the Holy Spirit, eager for what comes next.