



Church of St. John the Evangelist, Elora  
February 18 2024 - First Sunday in Lent  
Canon Paul Walker

Thank you to everyone  
who participated to  
make the Shrove

Tuesday Pancake Supper such a success. I don't remember seeing that many people attend the Pancake Supper. People just kept coming, and we just kept flipping pancakes, grilling sausages and serving ice cream with sprinkles.

This is one of the things we are about: gathering together. It's what Anglicans do and it's what Christians do: gather together, and particularly we gather around food. In worship we gather around word and sacrament: baptism and eucharist. Those are the events where we understand to see God at work in our lives and in our world. They are symbols that reflect the covenant God has established of being with us: Immanuel.

If you know of someone who might be interested in baptism, let me know. Baptism is the rite of initiation whereby, in response to all that God has accomplished in the world through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, you make an intentional and public declaration that you want to follow the way of Christ. You are anointed with oil and you receive the light of Christ to show that you have passed from darkness into light. If you know of someone who is interested in

preparing for baptism, we will celebrate it at the Easter Vigil on Saturday March 30 in the evening and we will renew our own baptism promises. It is a powerful liturgy where we begin outside around a fire and come into the dark church with the pascal candle, the light of Christ, and by candlelight we hear the story of salvation and redemption culminating in an account of the resurrection.

We do not worship something dead in the past, but something living in the present. We follow the way of the living Christ, not the dead Christ. It's what the creed points us to - the five great narrative moments of Christ: the birth, death, resurrection, ascension and return of Christ. But it doesn't stop there. Through the power of the Spirit in every generation God calls a people together to bear witness to this light. We are the ones called out of darkness into the light. As Philip said, "Come and see" the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; or as the Samaritan woman at the well said, "come and see" the One who has knows everything about me; or as Mary Magdalene who ran back to the others in the upper room said, "come and see" the empty tomb and the one who could not be contained by death.

We offer the same invitation to others. Come and see all that is happening at St. John's Elora. And we do all these things that we might proclaim the love of Christ. It's what we are called to. It's what our mission is, and it is what is reflected in the four pillars

of our vision. It's what we gather around for our annual Vestry on Saturday morning. It is what shapes our budget and our resources. We are a people that are so captivated by the presence of the living Christ in our midst that we want to share that living hope with others.

There are always signs along our journey that point us back on to the path of life. Things that bring us back into the light. Whenever God makes a covenant there is always an accompanying sign that He means it; it's real, and it will not be broken. We count on and need those signs for our journey.

Noah was given the sign of a rainbow; Abraham was given a sign of circumcision; Moses was given a sign of the ten commandments; David was given a sign of the ark of the covenant; Mary was given a sign of her cousin Elizabeth who was expecting a child, so she ran to see that sign.

The shepherds were given a sign of a child wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger; wise men were given a sign of a star; the crowd was given a sign of water into wine at a wedding, or the sign of five loaves and two fish in the wilderness.

Peter was given a sign of the linen wrappings in the empty tomb; Thomas was given a sign of the wounds in Jesus' body; and we are given signs of water, wine, bread; oil, candles and music; signs of baptism and eucharist.

"How much many more signs do you need?" Jesus asks. These are signs that point us back to the promise of God to not destroy us, condemn us, abandon us or forsake us in life or in death but to bring us into the arms of his love. Forever.

In the journey of Lent we acknowledge that all our own efforts to save ourselves from despair, to make our own way in the wilderness, to create our own light are all for naught. As much as we try, we learn that we just can't do it.

So we lean in to the One who has gone before us, and when we forget how to do that, we lean in to one another and we point each another back to the One who gives us life and hope.

After Jesus' baptism, the Spirit drove him into the wilderness where he was tempted by Satan, the accusing one, for 40 days. Satan is the one who accuses. It's such a damning thing to be accused. It comes so easy to us and it's far from liberating. Forty just means a very long time - whether it was 40 days or 40 years it was a very long time to be accused. It felt like a generation. In that time, the angels waited on Jesus and reminded him of who he belonged to. In these weeks of Lent, may you be an angel to one another, that you might call one another into God's marvellous light and be reminded of God's covenant of love.