

**Sermon for Scott
Delivered at St. Paul's Episcopal Church
6:30 pm, November 18th, 2009**

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the cornerstone.”

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, AMEN

Recently, while driving back from a road trip to Kentucky, I heard a radio interview with Daryl Hall and John Oates. One fateful evening, in 1967, these two young musicians met. A strange and tragic event had forced them to flee to the same elevator for safety. On that elevator a lifelong friendship began. At one point in the interview these friends and collaborators – the longest and most successful pop duo in history – were asked how they had been able to stay together so long. The answer was quite compelling: “Our history was our future,” one of them said.

Both Daryl Hall and John Oates had grown up in what they describe as “very similar circumstances.” Although they didn’t know one another as children both had grown up in Philadelphia, separated by a distance of just fifteen miles. What has kept them together after that fateful night, for the last 42 years, is that they share something important, something that we can all identify with – they shared vicinity. Now people from New Orleans know what that means. In a city that retains a larger number of “natives” than any other city in North America, New Orleanians get this. In a city that has experienced life and death together, you get this. In a city where you have experienced birth, wilderness

and deliverance together, you get this. New Orleanians understand the power of vicinity.
Yeah you right.

I can remember very well the first time that I met Scott Albergate. The occasion was a meeting of the Uptown Deanery held at All Saints Episcopal Church in River Ridge. Scott was visiting the uptown deanery as the newly appointed Canon for Congregational Development and I was attending my first deanery meeting as a clergyperson in the Diocese.

While I can't say that I was excited about walking into the parish hall at All Saints that day I can say that I was comforted. I was comforted because I knew that Scott Albergate was going to be there. Scott's presence meant that I wouldn't be the only one. I wouldn't be only one who needed directions on how to get to River Ridge, let alone not the only one who wouldn't know, just by the name, where the church was located – on the ridge, by the river, up-river...duh; I was comforted because I was not the only one to come to New Orleans by way of New York, New Jersey and a place that is "hi" in the middle and "round" on the ends – O-HI-O! I was comforted because I wasn't the only one who still didn't quite know to whom or about what the terms "Who Dat?" and "Yeah you right" actually meant.

I was comforted at my first Deanery meeting because I knew that if my name were Daryl Hall I'd have my John Oates – I wouldn't be alone. Comforted because I'd have someone with whom I shared vicinity; I would not be the only newcomer – not the only stranger, not

the only alien. Yeah you right. You know what I mean. We had vicinity, me and Scott – our history would act at least as our present, if not our future.

Two years have passed since then and tonight we celebrate Scott's installation as your rector. There have been countless "installation" sermons that have made good fun of this term, as if St. Paul's were *installing* a new dishwasher. At 9:30 last night, as I sat in my office writing this sermon, even our treasurer joked with me as he paid bills in the next room: "Jim, it's late, I'd go for the standard installation service if I were you."

But there is no standard installation happening tonight. There is nothing standard about what we have come to celebrate this evening. We could take this time to make humorous puns about dishwashers. We could also take this time to talk about how, although Scott is ordained and wears funny clothes and a plastic collar and a white dress on Sundays, he, like you and me, is still human.

But you know that, don't you? I think Scott does. Neither of you, after all, is a newbie. St. Paul's has had its share of Rectors and Scott has had his share of churches. Scott's last position led him to many churches and to many vestries. In frank but hopeful conversations about the church, more than once, in that strong Yankee voice of his, and just before emitting one of his deep guffaws, I have heard Scott say, "You just couldn't make this stuff up." If neither of you have learned from these experiences we might as well pack up and go home. Same ol' same ol' as they used to say in Cincinnati.

But there is no same ol' same ol' tonight. This is no standard installation. St. Paul's has been torn down and built back again. A series of strange and tragic events has led the people of St. Paul's and a priest named Scott Albergate to the same elevator (I'd push an "up" button if I were you). And despite the fact that New Orleans and New Jersey are a little further than fifteen miles apart – more like a thousand – tonight marks the sacramental beginning of the discovery of your vicinity to one another; to the ties that will bind you and challenge you and bring the best, and sometimes the worst, out of both of you. Tonight you begin collaborating on the songs that you will write and sing together as a congregation. Tonight you begin the work of walking forward in ministry together, as priest and parish, as shepherd and flock, as people who share vicinity.

And the vicinity you share is the vicinity of Christ. Christ within you to keep you, before you to lead you, beside you to guard you. Scott may not have been here with you when you lived through the individual and collective experiences that make parishes what they are – shared stories – but he is here now, and the narrative you share is the narrative we celebrate tonight. By him and with him and in him we are brothers and sisters baptized by the blood of our lamb, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose life binds us one to another, making us kin to one another, kin to our enemies, kin to our God.

And this, I think, is where God wants us to be tonight – at the brink of the discovery of our shared vicinity. This, I think, is the work of the church. As the author of Ephesians implores, tonight you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are citizens in the household of God, built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ

himself as the cornerstone. Being in vicinity with one another means that the one who was once far off has been brought near – there are no longer races and genders and dividing lines – there is just humanity – what it is, what it needs, and what it will be when everything that divides us is torn down in Christ – vicinity with God!

Scott’s call as your rector and your call as the church is to discover this vicinity. In a very real way, this is indeed how the life of Christ, our shared history, becomes our future and hopefully our present, in the church – by remembering, and then embodying, the reality that God’s history is literally our present. The staff and administration of St. Paul’s school know this mantra well – “the future is here.” In the Eucharist we call this remembering anamnesis and we pray that this anamnesis – this recalling of what and who Christ is and has done for us in the giving of himself, will bring us to epiklesis, to the heartfelt invitation for the Holy spirit to bless and sanctify our work in the church so that we may faithfully serve God and one another in unity, constancy, and peace.

And this is my prayer for St. Pauls, and for the journey you begin together tonight. That you, Scott, and you, the faithful people of St. Paul’s, can serve one another in unity, constancy, and peace. This does not mean you will always like one another, but it does mean that you’ll always love one another, for better for worse, in sickness and in health. This does not mean that building your relationship and your shared ministry together will be easy or without err, but it does mean that the only thing that will outweigh your failings is your forgiveness. Finally, it means that tonight we celebrate the life and ministry of the whole church when done so in vicinity of our Christ, for in him the whole structure is

joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; and in whom you, Scott, and you, the members of St. Paul's, are also built together spiritually into one dwelling place for God!

May God bless your work together, your care for one another, and your new life together in the blessed ministry of vicinity. And may you smile awhile for one another,

Amen

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