

75th Anniversary Sermon
April 30, 2017
The Rev. Fred Devall

How do you sum up 75 years in one sermon? Do we mark time through the administrations of our four rectors? Historians tend to take this path, but it often overlooks the important contributions of various assistant clergy, good people like Rob Johnson, Donald Muth, Trawin Malone, Mary Kopple or Jeff Millican. It also would overlook the important ministries of The Rev. Deacons Kathleen Comer, Maggie Dawson, and Priscilla Maumus, to say nothing of the body of laity, whom I like to call the Great Cloud of Witnesses- people like O.E. and Gladys Haring, Lou Richardson, the Popes, the Hatches, the Smiths, and you.

In my first year in seminary I regularly worshiped in a cozy church near the state department in Washington, D.C. called St. Mary's Foggy Bottom. They had a wonderful All Saints Day tradition- to read the names of every parishioner who had been buried from that church in its more than 100 year history. Yes, it took a long time but there was something deeply moving about that practice. That's really what we should be doing today- remembering the Great Cloud of Witnesses who built this place and have now gone to their reward. Time prevents us from doing that formally, but I hope you will take a moment to remember the people who shepherded you into this church.

One of our parishioners, Donna Cousins, took time to write down many of her church memories and I want to read her concluding sentence because it captures the essence of our community, "I will close this reminiscence with the hope that those who read it will find it entertaining as well as interesting and why we at St. Martin's Church are a "family" more than just members who meet one day a week and adjourn until the next Sunday". She's right- we don't just come together and scatter to the wind; we come to break bread, share our lives and proclaim the Lord until he comes again. We recollect the hundreds of weddings and funerals, and thousands of confirmations, and myriad baptisms. This church is more than bricks and mortar, tears and treasures- it is the bones of our common life- the skeletal structure that upholds the body of Christ in this place that we call St. Martin's Episcopal Church. It is impossible to sum up 75 years of faithfulness, but it is possible to place ourselves in the context of the wider of the Christian story.

In 1942 a group of Christians living in Metairie decided to establish a church in this growing portion of the city. Many of these people were parishioners at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Carrollton but had hopes of establishing a church closer to their own neighborhood. In the midst of a war and with no building other than rented Sunday space at Metairie High School, St. Martin's Episcopal Church was established and the rest is literally, history- a good history. 75 years later we continue to witness the Lord's resurrection and be a force for good in Old Metairie and beyond.

To faithfully continue being the Lord's witnesses, we need to keep our facilities in first class shape, not so much as Fort St. Martin but rather as launch pad St. Martin's. That's what the 75th Anniversary Capital Stewardship Campaign is all about. I hope that today, if you have not done so already, you will make a pledge in support of retiring the capital debt from Growing in Faith, remodel the chapel, purchase and relocate a new organ, and adorn our narthex with a beautiful mosaic as we transition from the world to the time and space of worship. Pledge cards are in your pews and your generosity is needed for our church to take bold steps for the next 75 years. Like most of you when our family arrived here in 2004 we walked into an established church. We were not asked for anything up front. It was a gift given to us by many people, the Cloud of Witnesses who came before us. Just as the Cloud of Witnesses exhibited a faithful generosity in their day so now is our time to step up and add to the foundation that was entrusted to us in our day. Now is our time to secure St. Martin's for our children and our children's children. If we so choose, today can be a day of biblical proportion.

We live in a time of extraordinary cultural change. All around us there seems to be flux. We know this firsthand through changing patterns of church participation. Remember this, things around us may change, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ does not change. It is our charge as a church people to uphold the good news. Humanity still needs to be reminded of God's love. As a community built on this love we are tasked with modeling a way to live that differs from the prevailing culture of indifference to greed and violence.

But the church is not just an oasis where we can simply camp out; it a community of Christians going into the world in witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are times when we fall short. Just as the disciples on the road to Emmaus came up short when they failed to recognize Jesus, even when he was walking with them side by side. Their failure to recognize Jesus had to do with their focus. In the time of their sadness they were focused only on their own loss.

Let this be a warning and reminder to the church to always look beyond ourselves. When we lift up our eyes, we will surely behold Jesus.

In 2092 when our descendants shall gather here to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of St. Martin's Church, they won't much remember us beyond the names written in the church records, but that won't matter. We aren't here to make ourselves famous; we're here to make Jesus famous. That is what resurrection witnesses do; that is what our Cloud of Witnesses have done for the past 75 years, and it is what we are called to do in our day, in our time. If there is a 150th celebration, and I'm sure there will be, it will be because we succeeded in making Jesus famous. God bless us in this endeavor. *Amen.*