

Introduction to Heritage Interim Event, September 22, 2019
Grace and Holy Trinity Church, Richmond, VA
The Rev. Bill Queen, “Our Heritage Sustains Us”

where has GHTC come from as a parish? what is our spiritual genealogy, our spiritual ancestry, our spiritual heritage? what is our heritage from a biblical and theological perspective? let’s look at a prayer, Bible readings, and an image that can help us think this through

Collect for Proper 8

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

this collect recognizes several things; that the church, any church, this church, is not our church, but Christ’s church; that the church is not church buildings, but is people who are joined to Christ; and that all gatherings of church-peoples, such as this parish, are built upon and supported by the foundation laid down by other people: by the prophets, by the apostles, and by Jesus himself; so when we talk about the heritage of GHTC, we have to consider much more than the perspective from Grace Church’s 1858 founding to the present; we have to consider the perspective all the way from biblical times to the present

Isaiah 58:9b-12, 14

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in. Then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the

heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Isaiah talks about our heritage being a gift from God which must be used properly; it lists offering food to the hungry and satisfying the needs of the afflicted—ministries we do well, wisely using the gifts God has entrusted to us; it also recognizes that God’s heritage feeds us and sustains us; it recognizes that our heritage is again something that goes as far back as the Hebrew scriptures; and that the foundations we continue to build upon today will stand for future generations to build upon

Psalm 16:5-11

O LORD, YOU are my portion and my cup; it is you who uphold my lot. My boundaries enclose a pleasant land; indeed, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the LORD who gives me counsel; my heart teaches me, night after night. I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand I shall not fall. My heart, therefore, is glad, and my spirit rejoices; my body also shall rest in hope. For you will not abandon me to the grave, nor let your holy one see the Pit. You will show me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, and in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

this Psalm reminds us that our “pleasant land” and “goodly heritage” again are gifts from God; we have material and immaterial riches that surpass many churches in our town: our location, our facilities, our budget, our endowment, our committed staff, and our gifted parishioners; what is the path that God is showing us as “the path of life”—the path to follow to put these great riches not to our own purposes, but to God’s purposes?

1st Corinthians 3:5-11

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each

builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

1st Corinthians reiterates how each generation builds upon the work of those faithful church-people who came before us; we exercise our spiritual gifts, but it is God who guides and empowers those gifts; and that it is people who are God's field, God's building, God's church; are we, to change metaphors, investing as much in the future people of GHTC as we are in the future buildings and furnishings?

Matthew 7:24-27

Jesus said, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!"

Matthew talks about the wisdom of making sure that we continue to build only upon the most stable of foundations—that foundation being the words of Jesus and actions that follow from them; no other foundation can support God's church-people doing God's work

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finally, look at the image above; you see there a church building—but remember that the church is not a building, but people symbolized by that building; the church is depicted as a living tree, whose roots go deeply into the ground, supporting and sustaining a flourishing foliage; this image depicts not only space, but also time; GHTC's roots must be understood to go deep into the past, as deep as biblical times; our drawing of nourishment from those roots not only sustains who we are today, it also enables future growth to spread those branches farther outward and farther upward

GHTC is a unique church community, formed by our heritage, by the influence from the particularity of this place where this parish has experienced its long history, by its people, and by how it has decided over the years to feed itself and to feed others; and from those choices, how it has exercised its faith in worship, in outreach, and in other ministries

now, with these long and large perspectives in mind, we'll continue with our Heritage Event's activities