

The Church Mouse/Vashon Lutheran Church
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JANUARY 2023



The Church Mouse

From the Desk of Pr. Aitken

Dear beloved members of Vashon Lutheran:

“Home by another way” has been a Biblical phrase that has stayed with me since I first heard it as a child in church. It really got my attention. And it has held my attention all these years. You remember it, it’s that horrible story we hear this time of year in Chapter 2 of Matthew’s gospel and what the Church has called “The Slaughter of the Holy Innocents.” We have observed it for 1600 years now.

In the story, King Herod summons the Magi who had followed the star to find the infant named Jesus, and who arrive in Jerusalem seeking this new-born King. Herod lies, and tells the wise men to find the child, then come back and tell him where he is, so that he may “go and worship him also. After the Magi find the Holy Family in Bethlehem and leave gifts for Jesus, God sends a dream to them and told them not to go home by way of Jerusalem, but to “go home by another way” and foil Herod’s evil intent to kill the child. They follow that advice. In a Furious rage that he was tricked by the Magi, Herod orders the killing of all the boys under two in Bethlehem, just to make sure he snuffed out any possible rival to his Kingship.

“Go home by another way” is good advice for all of us, probably at many times in our lives. Have you not, like me, taken a path in life which was not the best one? A path that led to a dead end, so to speak, a path that didn’t lead to new life, but to old patterns that lacked integrity and hurt you and others? We are human after all. And when that time came again in life to go down that same path, some voice, some counsel told you to not go there again, but “go home by another way.”

The December 11th after-worship discussion meeting:

I have seen in my time with you this past year, and culminating



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at the Dec. 11th Mission discussion meeting, how well you work together. With intentionally, kindness and faith you are thinking about the way you were going to travel forward as a congregation in ministry, with Christ at the center. **I commend you for this.** Take this into your hearts: You are good and faithful servants of our Lord. You care about your community, about your call in Christ to love and to be hands for healing on the Island, and even beyond. You make this retired Bishop happy. You have strengthened the gift of faith in me by your words and deeds. So going forward, you may well do some things similar to the past, and yet “go home by another way” with ministry as well, going by way of what is needed now, in this time and place. You will do well. I am your proud cheerleader! And while I am moving more deeply into retirement - I will also be with you on occasion for pulpit supply and you can bet you will be in my prayers - all the time!

Pax, +Pr. Aitken

Rev. Thomas M. Aitken

Pronouns: he / him / his (why do I use my pronouns?) <https://tinyurl.com/y4f3sagt>

I acknowledge the peoples – past, present, and future – of the Dkhw’Duw’Absh, the Duwamish Tribe, the Muckleshoot Tribe, and other Coast Salish peoples on whose traditional lands and waters I live on.



From the Bishop:

More than twenty years ago now, when I was serving in a congregation, I sat with a woman who was dying. I loved this woman. Her name was Bobbie. She was fierce and funny. She was smart. She could be a little intimidating. She was a tall, big woman who pounded her cane into the ground as she walked. Throughout her life, like most people, she knew grief and joy. Disappointment and surprise. I was honored to hold her hand and sit with her as she took her last breaths.

As pastor, I have had the opportunity to sit with many people as they are dying. It is one of the most holy things a person can do. There is truly a thinness between what is and what is to come. While there are many things I love and miss as a congregational pastor, one of the top absences is being invited into people’s lives as they leave this world and enter into God’s presence in the company of all the saints.

Recently I attended a three-day retreat with several bishops and leaders from the western part of the United States. Most of what we talked about and discerned was what it means to be church today. Included in the conversation was how to journey and accompany congregations that are dying. This retreat wasn’t a “how-to manual” of what to do. Instead, the intentional prayer, singing, worship, and community led us to sit in the same “thinness” feeling that I mentioned above: what is and what is to come.

As we sat in both the grief of some of our congregations closing and in the anticipation of what God is calling us towards, one person made the comment, “There is Spirit-led death and then there is just

death.” I’ve been pondering about this statement since it was said. What does it mean to have a Spirit-led death? What does it mean to just die?

Perhaps we can use Bobbie’s death as a guide.

I think back to Bobbie who I met with many times before she died. She made it clear to me what her wishes were for her funeral. She talked many times about how thrilled she would be to see her husband again. (Her husband died when he was twenty-eight leaving her with two small sons.) She was looking forward to resting. She wanted to make sure that I knew how glad she was to not be a burden any more to her sons. She had hopes for the assets she was leaving behind and how they would be used to further her passions. Most of all, she was excited about what was next for her – she talked quite frequently about the questions she was ready to ask Jesus.

In the weeks before Bobbie died, her sons called me to ask if I would be available to sit with Bobbie when she died. They lived far away and knew that they might not make it to her bedside in time. I, of course, said yes. When the nurse called me, I went.

In Bobbie’s last hours on earth, I was with her. I felt God’s holy presence as I held her hand, sang hymns, prayed the Lord’s prayer, shed tears, sat in silence, loved her, and was present with her and Jesus in the thin place between life and death and resurrection.

Going back to the retreat that I was at and the questions that arose, I wonder how we can have language to talk about some congregations having Spirit-led deaths. While I hope and pray that all congregations thrive and grow, I also know that there is a life cycle for all things. And I want to be able to live in the thinness between life and death and resurrection with all of us in the Northwest Washington Synod. I want to have the hard, deep conversations that need to happen. I want us to talk about looking beyond survival and instead talk about death and resurrection. How can we do this in meaningful ways? How can we do this before there is a sudden death? How can we do this acknowledging the pain and heartache and also living in faith and hope?

We in the synod office want to journey with you in these conversations. It is not easy and it is not wanted. But it is a time that can be holy and where God’s presence is made known.

As this new year begins, may we walk together in the Spirit – placing our hope in God through Jesus. May we journey as resurrection people.

+ Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee
bishop@lutheransnw.org



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Thank you, Pr. Thomas M. Aitken for leading us in worship on Jan 8!

VLC annual Congregational Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, Jan. 29, 2023, right after the worship service. Hard copies of the most recent VLC Constitution/Bylaws and the minutes from the last congregational meeting will be available next week on the information table in the fellowship hall.

Giving Your Offering – If you would like to continue giving an offering to VLC, our mailing address is: Vashon Lutheran Church, P. O. Box 2930, Vashon, WA 98070.

The Care Closet, Medical Equipment/Supplies – 206-473-8715. Vashon Care Network – 206-604-3253.

Email: contact@vashoncarenetwork.org; website: www.vashoncarenetwork.org

Contact Gail Larson (206/567-4779) with your prayer requests.

OUR FAITH IN ACTION

SUNDAY

1st, Food Bank Sunday

10:30 AM-12:00 PM Sunday Worship Service and Coffee

Jan. 29, 2023, 11:30 AM VLC Annual Congregational Meeting

MONDAY

10:00 AM Intercessory Prayer Group

Jan. 9, 5:00 PM Mission Planning Committee ZOOM meeting

TUESDAY

2nd, 9:00 – 1:00 PM Quilt Sewers Group

3rd, 10:00 – noon Vashon Quilting Group

WEDNESDAY

1st, 9:00 – noon Lutheran Quilters Group

Jan. 18, 7:00 PM Council ZOOM Meeting

FRIDAY

7:00 - 8:30 PM AA Group for Men

“Arise, shine;
for your light
has come, and
the glory of the
Lord has risen
upon you.
For darkness
shall cover the
earth, and thick
darkness the
peoples;
but the Lord
will arise upon
you, and his
glory will
appear over you.
Nations shall
come to your
light, and kings
to the brightness
of your dawn.”
Isaiah 60



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