Annual Meeting Sermon January 24, 2016 Christ Church, Exeter The Rev. Mark B. Pendleton

After three years as your rector you know that I endeavor to search far and wide into the cultural universe to find new ways of applying our ancient Scripture readings to everyday life. Today is no exception. Case in point: the mic drop.

No one is quite sure who came up with this expression. The online magazine *Slate* featured an article on the origins of the 'mic drop' phenomena three years ago. They discovered that comedians and rappers have been using the mic drop technique since the 1980's: ending the set or routine by literally dropping their microphone and walking off the stage.

I want to suggest that the true originator of the 'mic drop' lived centuries ago. It was of course Jesus. The setting is Nazareth where Jesus had been brought up. He was the local kid made good. Reports were spreading through the area and people praised him.

And when Jesus returned home, he went to the synagogue. What some of us may not know, but many of the rituals, the prayers and the pattern for early Christian worship came from the Jewish synagogues just like the one in the story. It was the place to read Scripture and to discuss and share what the people learned. It was classroom and gathering place. It was chapel, sanctuary, and parish hall.

Jesus stood up, was handed a scroll, found what he wanted to read, Isaiah 61:1-2, and then read it. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. Mic drop. Then he said: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus took center stage, he read, he sat down and then he taught.

Commentator Fred Craddock writes that "this event announces who Jesus is, of what his ministry consists, what his church will be and do, and what will be the response to both Jesus and the church." It lays out the who, what and why.

Jesus was the Christ, the chosen one, whose life and teaching would be about freedom, liberation and recovery of what had been lost and he would welcome in a new way and time of being alive. The year of the Lord's favor was a way to imagine a resetting of the clocks in terms of human relationships and the God who created them. Where it could be anticipated that sins would be forgiven, old debts settled, the fields would be able to rest and lay fallow, those far away from home would be able to return, people were treated fairly and justly.

I like how the way Fred Craddock frames the synagogue event and I think it can help us remember why it's worth every year gathering at one time and place to look over our life and work together as a parish.

We should be able to say or believe in our hearts, in our way and in our in own words, the who, what and why of God.

Who is God? Who is Jesus? Those are the essential questions behind every Sunday School class.

If you come to church, you will hear God and Jesus spoken of in the creeds we recite, in the passages we listen to, in the hymns we sing and in the prayers we pray. All of those images, all of the language, is the ground upon which we all must define and claim who God and Jesus are for us. No inspiring definition from a theologian who lived centuries ago will do much good when and if we are facing down a dark night of doubt, loneliness, fear and uncertainty.

What we do first and foremost here is claim and reclaim who God should be. We dust off the labels of our childhoods, we set aside the trauma or boredom or absence of any Christian teaching or theology of youth, and we try at least to start anew. We gather to hear, in this sacred space, and say: God is good. God is everlasting. God gives us peace. God is beyond what I can imagine. God is real. God is personal. God listens when others don't. God makes me better, kinder, more accepting of others and myself. And Jesus shows me how to be human. How not to judge the surface of others but look deep inside.

What will the church be and do? Jesus, again, had clarity in his hometown. Good news to the poor, release, recovery, freedom.

His words spoke of the connection between us all. There is no joy in heaven when and if people live in poverty, captivity, blindness of need and oppressed by themselves or others.

Paul introduces the essence of what it means to take Jesus of Nazareth manifesto cobble together post-Resurrection followers.

He writes a letter to a young that church sounds like the stump speech of a good Politian: there are many members of the body but there is still only one body. We find something similar on our coins and money in the motto *E Pluribus Unum*, "Out of Many One." Regardless of where you were born and your status or wealth – in Paul's day Jew or Greek, slaves or free – today it might be young or old, straight or gay, black or white, native born or immigrant, and we are all one.

Paul addresses the why of Jesus ministry that was declared in the synagogue. Vs. 26 "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Life does not always work like this, but it should and can. It can start with clean water. Each one of can go over to a tap and turn in on and drink clean healthy water. This is also why we bring water systems to Cuba. That is what makes the disaster in Flint, Michigan a disgrace of historic proportions. A preventable manmade disaster now impacting hundreds of children for as long as they live. "It one suffers, all suffer together."

What we often miss is the being united in Christ does not mean we can always achieve or maintain uniformity and agreement. We see this globally and locally.

This is something the worldwide Anglican Communion still grapples with. Some of you may have heard the press accounts last week that the Episcopal Church was reprimanded by the Primates gathered in England for our progressive social teaching on marriage and human sexuality.

The impact in the life of you and me in the Episcopal Church will be minimal if at all. We are no less nor more Anglican and Episcopalian than we were two weeks ago. What we are witnessing though is the worldwide communion of churches wrestling with issues that we have been living with here in New Hampshire for some time. We have held up equality, inclusion, understanding as guiding principles.

Being suspended from high-level church meetings for three years will not cause us to go back into time. Many of us who attend the Episcopal Church have already decided that life evolves and changes overtime: not all matters rise to the status of unmovable dogma and doctrine.

The world is changing. The Anglican Communion as we once knew it, with the English and Americans reigning over their collective cultural and spiritual empires is a thing of the past.

I will be traveling on January 25 to Cape Town, South Africa with Community of the Cross of Nails. We will visit with the staff of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. I will have the opportunity to preach and visit a number of churches. We will be OK we Anglicans, or Episcopalians -- or whatever some might want to call us. Have faith. Keep the faith.

With all the effort we put into capturing the sum of our ministry here at Christ Church over the course of a year, the reports we distribute will never capture fully why we do what we do. We can count households joining the church, or count seats in the pews, be thankful for passing a balanced budget this year, and we know that that is not the true way to measure what only God can see and what you and I can feel.

Jesus told Nicodemus: "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

The hardest part of the experience we had over these last months working with an architect to begin imagining what a new building could look like if we decide ultimately to go that route, is that we cannot know exactly what the future will look like. We can look in the rear view mirror and cite statistics and other annual reports to know what happened years before, but the only thing we can fairly certain of is that the future will look different from the past.

Knowing this, may tomorrow be guided by the who, what and why of God. No 'mic drop' for me today. Just thankfulness that the snow stayed to our south on this one occasion and that whatever the future holds, we will respond, adapt, imagine and with God's help rise to any challenge. Together.