

## Reflection on the 40th Anniversary of St. Matthew's Worship Site

Sometimes, I receive emails or Facebook items that go like this: who remembers:

- the times when we turned on our tv's by actually pushing a button on a nicely styled cabinet that weighted 600 lb
- everyone in the family sat, on floral Livingroom furniture or shagged carpet to watch the same show.
- big hair... the big shoulder pads... dance music that we actually could dance to and understood the lyrics.
- Sunday Church attendance was still important after we ate dinner together as a family, we played our sports like hockey and basketball because it was only for fun...
- at the end it says, "I am sure happy that I grew up in the 1970's and 80's!"

I was a boy in the 1970's and a teen in the 1980's. They were indeed good times. In our part of the world, things were happening, Saint John was booming with Shipbuilding, Canada Games, A new Market Square. There was a 'newness' and an excitement that evolved. There was a great 'Spirit'... things were happening. The same could be said of the early Church like those first followers that we have been hearing about from our First Readings. Even our little hamlets, villages and towns were growing. And so were our churches.

This was the backdrop and environment that new churches needed to be built to accommodate the people. One of these new churches being the one we sit in: St. Matthew's... a state of the art building for its time. On a Friday evening in May of 1985, our saintly Bishop Gilbert ordained 5 new priests for our diocese (one of them being our own Fr. Tom Fowler). The Following Sunday, St. Matthew's Church was consecrated.

How did this come about? It started in the 1960's, with a new attitude, a new vision and a new direction. Pope John 23rd recongnized it was time for the Church to 'open it's doors and windows and breath fresh air into a 2000 year old institution.' thus he called Vatican II... one of the greatest events in our church history. Yes, it try was a time of a 'new hope'.

One of the beautiful documents that came out of Vatican II was *Lumen Gentium... Light of the Nations...* (one of my favourites). Chapter 7 of this document, reminds us the church itself as pilgrim. Our tradition teaches that we are all, by our baptism, pilgrims on a journey, to our final destiny to be in communion with God for all of eternity. That's always been a teaching of the church and it remains true now.

But Vatican II didn't just say we're a church of pilgrims; it said we're a pilgrim church. All of us, from pope to pauper, we're all on the same journey. Therefore, I feel that it is not by accident that we celebrate our Jubilee year entitled "Pilgrims of Hope" chosen by the late Pope Francis and our 40th Anniversary of St. Matthew's Church Building.

And we need to be constantly reminded of this! Thats why anniversaries like our 40th are so important. Celebrating a church anniversary is a significant event, marking not just years of existence but also the impact and growth of a spiritual community. It's a time for reflection, gratitude, and looking forward to the future. The anniversary celebration is an opportunity to look forward with hope and that comes to us from our baptismal mandate: to serve. It's a time to reaffirm the our vision of our parish Holy Spirit Parish as a "welcoming, worshipping and

witnessing' community in which St. Matthew's Worship Site is an integral part of and to recommit ourselves to serving its members and the wider community.

How appropriate that we would have today's gospel. It's the night before Jesus's crucifixion, immediately following the Last Supper. Having just shared the bread and cup and a special meal with his followers, Jesus and the others are sitting around the table talking. Then Jesus gives a long speech to his disciples, sharing all the information they will need to continue doing his work. He is speaking to prepare them for a time when he will soon not be physically present with them.

I wonder how the disciples felt, reclining after their meal and receiving these teachings. Probably they were asking questions like, What is he talking about? Where is he going? Why is he going? Why weren't we invited? How can we follow him? Jesus tells them he is going away, that they cannot follow but he will make a way for them, and that they will be provided for in his absence. God will send the "Advocate" or "Holy Spirit" in his name.

We live in a world of pain, uncertainty, and fear. We are (rightfully) worried by what's happening around us, and amid these worries we're given something greater. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you," Jesus tells the disciples — and us — in his parting words. "I do not give to you as the world gives."

Jesus tells us not only will the Holy Spirit comfort us in our grief, but the Holy Spirit will bring us God's peace. In the world, peace may look like an absence of conflict, but God's peace is far greater; it's the presence of beauty and justice. God's peace meets us in our pain and despair and gives us hope for today and the future.

My dear friends, it takes faith to live in a world where our identity is dismissed and attacked. It takes faith to live in a world that is denying protections to the most vulnerable. It takes faith to live in a world where the dignity of every human being is not respected. What kind of faith is it that keeps us going on in the face of these devastating challenges?

By coming together in this church to worship and celebrate, our 40 anniversary strengthens the bonds of companionship. It reminds everyone of the unique role they play in the ongoing story of your church's journey. We are called through faith to stand on our foremothers and forefathers shoulders and to continue the hard work that they have begun.

It's faith birthed in the greatest gift Jesus leaves us: God's peace. St. Matthew's is a tangible sign of this peace. For sure we have something to celebrate! May our faith be rooted deeply in the blessing of God's peace, as we look forward as 'pilgrims of hope,' every day knowing the Holy Spirit dwells in us. And I know from experience, that we're not afraid to reveal that same Spirit to others through our hard work and commitment. As we turn the page to begin next chapter of SMWS, may we continue to do so with ardent faith that comes from our baptism. Congratulation and Happy Anniversary Everyone!

Fr. David