



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

May 31, 2009

## Pentecost Sunday

On May 30<sup>th</sup> 2004 I celebrated and preached at St. Johns. It was the last of 3 Sundays in that month that I had served as your supply priest. On that Sunday I told you I would no longer be with you as a supply priest because I had been selected by St. Johns and consequently appointed by the bishop to become your priest in charge. June 1<sup>st</sup> 2004 was my official starting date and it is hard to believe it has been 5 years.

Looking back it has been an amazing journey for all of us. It was as if God took an awful lot of brokenness and just brought it together with grace, humility, tears, and lots of love and said trust me and let me show you what I can do.

You see the key word in 2004 for all of us was survival. At St. Johns in January of 2004, 2/3 of the congregation just got up and walked out. Angry over some decisions that had been made in the church. Not only did the people leave but they took with them ¾ of the pledge money and St. Johns had a struggle on its hand. The building was in terrible condition, the Hughes house really had been left to rot.

And into all this comes a priest who was recently divorced and was just learning to deal with the death of his beautiful daughter Rachel.

The word survival was never used but it was certainly lived on a day to day basis...

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

210 North Main Street Versailles, KY 40383 859.873.3481 [info@stjohnsky.com](mailto:info@stjohnsky.com) [www.stjohnsky.com](http://www.stjohnsky.com)



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St Johns was not very well known in the community except that an ugly split had taken place. I remember in my early days here one person in the community thought we were the chapel for the Baptist church.

So in 2004, this remnant of brokenness that god brought together, this remnant that was hurt, grieving, sometimes angry, and very small in numbers rolled up our sleeves and said we are a community of worship and that's what we will do.

We worked on St. Johns becoming a welcoming place that shows nothing less than the face of Christ. We opened our hearts and our doors to the community. We responded to needs in the community, in the nation, and in the world. We built on the foundation laid for the Christian formation of ourselves. We danced and we laughed and we enjoyed one another's company. We have struggled with issues but being a Christian does not make us exempt we are not exempt from struggling with issues. Yet as Christians it is how we struggle together with honesty and openness, respect courtesy and love that make the struggle Godly.

Because of all this, today in the community, we are now known as St. Johns -the church with an open door, both for individuals who wish to worship and groups who need a place to meet.

I say all this because a lot has happened in 5 years. St Johns is now the little church that could. And has. And will continue to be.

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We can look back over the 5 years and have an incredibly long list of ministries that have grown and thrived in and through and sometimes because of St. Johns.

On the feast of Pentecost in 2004 the focus was survival and on the feast of Pentecost today the focus is on mission and ministry. Jesus did not say to Phillip without reason, they who believe in me will do the works I do and greater works than these will they do because I go to the father.

Our faith in God in 2004 and our willingness to trust the spirit has brought us to where we are today. What has happened at St. Johns is not because of any single individual. It is because many opened themselves to the possibilities that God intended. To glimpse the vision that god has for St. Johns. To pray earnestly for the guidance to fulfill the mission and ministry that god has for St. Johns.

So we can look back with a deep sense of gratitude for all that has been done.

But the same words of Jesus to Philip still apply today. Yes we have done all this but there are still greater works to be done.

God is not finished with us at St. Johns.

I look back with a deep gratitude to have been part of something incredibly godly and holy. But now we are called to look forward. To strengthen the ministries we already have begun. And also to open our hearts to the possibilities of new opportunities for ministry in our community. To deepen our own

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spiritual journey and strengthen our own discipleship to carry out the mission and the ministry that god is calling us to. And to be assured that on this day of Pentecost the gift of the spirit is the gift that really does keep on giving. The last 5 years have proved that because we were open to not only receiving but using the gifts the spirit gave us. Nothing has changed. The gift of the spirit is ours.

Amen

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