

Installation of a Rector, *Feast of Mary Magdalene* (transferred)
The Rev. Todd Young
St. Luke's, Buffalo, 4 pm
21 July 2024

Let me begin by saying how sorry I am for what this diocese has been through in the last year. When I came here to consecrate a new bishop, in a snowy February in Covid-tide, we had no idea that your next bishop would be here only a short time. I know that the last year has been painful and difficult. Your leaders have asked me to walk beside you as we seek healing and hope for whatever God has in store for the future. The grief is still raw for some among us, and at the same time we yearn for healing and greater wholeness. God is at work in our midst, and you have many, many gifts here in this diocese. We will find a new normal, and new possibilities, and new connections in this body of faith.

Father Young chose today's readings because they are so focused on new life. We don't often hear from the Book of Judith, but it's part of what Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, and the Eastern Orthodox occasionally read in worship. Judith calls on God to protect the people of her city: "you are the God of the lowly, helper of the oppressed, upholder of the weak, protector of the forsaken, savior of those without hope... Hear my prayer!" It's as though she's shaking her fist at heaven, "come and help!" And then, "Let your whole nation and every tribe know and understand that you are God, the God of all power and might, and that there is no other who protects the people of Israel but you alone!"

I think we might affirm and recognize that your new rector will at times need to pray that same prayer, maybe even shaking his fist at the heavens, "come and help!" We've helped to begin with this long litany, knowing that it is the prayer of all, for the health and holiness of all who lead and offer and challenge in this community of faith, and for the world beyond this place. It is the holy work of this community (and all other communities,) and Fr. Young has vowed to be your partner in faith now and for the years to come. We're also going to hear others asking you to be with and serve in this community, for this ministry is within this congregation. He is also charged to be and serve with other leaders across the Diocese of Wyoming. You are called to be with those within *and beyond* St. Luke's, for the health of the greater body in this diocese.

This institution liturgy often seems to be all about the new rector. The hard stuff will land on his shoulders, as will some of the glory. All of you who are rooted and growing in this congregation have a duty and a vocation to uphold your new rector, and succor him in time of difficulty or loss. Be kind to his family, and take your complaints directly to him, rather than others. Rumor and whispering never healed anything. Your support and encouragement will always be a welcome blessing – and it will help him immensely. We are bound together in community, and it is meant to be just that – for healing and wholeness as we discern God's desire among us.

The vocation of a community like St. Luke's is about seeking new life and greater wholeness. That search requires the gifts and voices and vision of many different people. Share those with others in this body, remembering that we are here to uphold each and every one. Healthy and holy communities listen carefully to the differing gifts of others, and as you converse with each other, you will discover conversion and conversation – all ways of turning toward one another and toward God. The turning is never finished, for it is about ongoing resurrection, turning toward light and life, hope and love. May those gifts continue to resound

and return, bringing new life and possibilities. What new reality will you discover here in Buffalo? How might St Luke's become an even brighter beacon of light and life... and fount of blessing... and help in need? Keep up the holy conversation and you will find blessing!

It's something like the story of a little boy who kept asking for a pony. When his birthday rolled around, he rose early, only to see a big pile of horse manure outside in the yard. "Mommy, mommy, I know there's a pony in there somewhere!"

We all might do well to go looking for the gifts we don't recognize immediately. May you find treasures in your new rector and in yourselves, and in your fellow parishioners – they are most certainly there, though perhaps shyly hidden. Love each and every one of them, and you will keep finding new life. Bless your life and work in this place, and may it bless the world around and beyond us.