

**A Sermon from the Episcopal Parish of
St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts**
Preached by the Rev. Timothy E. Schenck on January 26, 2020 (Rector's Annual Address)

There's an old gospel blues song, first recorded in 1930 by Blind Willie Johnson, called "John the Revelator." As is common with blues songs that emerged from the Mississippi Delta, no one really knows who wrote it, and it's been recorded by a variety of artists over the years. From the country blues legend Son House to the Blues Brothers to Depeche Mode to Dave Matthews.

John the Revelator is another name for John the Evangelist, our patron saint, the author of the gospel that bears his name, and by tradition, the writer of the Book of Revelation.

Revelator simply means "one who reveals" and in particular, one who reveals the will of God. That is precisely what John the Evangelist does in making Jesus known to the world. But on this Annual Meeting Sunday, as we look back at the past year and look ahead to the year that is to come, I want to pause and help us reflect upon the ways in which we make God known in this community and the world.

Because as a community of faith, our primary calling is to be, like John, revelators. Revelators of God's love, revelators of reconciliation, revelators of justice, revelators of hope. We do this through worship and outreach, through invitation and compassion, through service and teaching. As individuals we have daily opportunities to reveal God's love to the world; as a Christian community revelation stands at the core of our mission. And we engaged in some innovative and faithful revelating over the past 12 months.

One of the hallmarks of this year has been our commitment to increased racial understanding and reconciliation through our Sacred Ground program. We have walked this ground with authenticity and intentionality; sometimes hesitantly and haltingly, but always with open if broken hearts. With this as our year-long educational and spiritual focus, we are mid-way through our journey through the chapters of America's often painful history of race and racism. We continue to face hard truths about race and culture in a world so desperately in need of racial healing and understanding. And we have been faithfully shepherded through this process by parishioners Holly Carter and Caitlin Sladden. I am so grateful for their revelatory leadership, and for everyone who is participating in this challenging but important work. This is what it means to be a revelator of God's love.

This year we also embraced a new approach to children's ministry at St. John's. Love First, as a children's ministry for the whole church, has reminded us that children's formation is not glorified child care, but a gift to the entire congregation. When children are seen and heard and loved and valued as integral members of the parish, we all benefit. This has been most visible as we have started offering occasional All Ages Worship services throughout the year.

I recently announced that St. John's will be the new home for Love First as we take on the role as the flagship parish for a growing ministry that is now being used by over 40 congregations. This new partnership will allow us to continue to strive for excellence and creativity as leaders in the movement to nurture the faith lives of our children both here in Hingham and in the wider church. I am grateful to our Sunday School Director Alexis MacElhiney, our Sunday School Leadership Team, and our volunteer teachers for having the courage to embrace this new approach. This is what it means to be a revelator of God's love.

In 2019 Laundry Love, an outreach ministry of the parish that offers dignity to individuals and families through clean clothes, expanded from its initial location at a laundromat in Hull to a second one in Weymouth. The small but dedicated group of parishioners who lead and serve in this relational ministry are actively breaking down barriers between and among people in our communities. They are sharing God's love in practical, tangible ways, serving as examples to all of us that small acts of kindness make a major difference in the world. This is what it means to be a revelator of God's love.

This month also marks the one-year anniversary of Jack's ministry among us. It's hard to express just how much of an impact she's had on this community. The Middle School Youth Group is thriving, her passion for justice is contagious, the depth of spirituality she has brought to this community through her seasonal mini-retreats is inspiring, her creativity working with children has been a joy to behold, and you may not know this, but she's the only one around here who drinks *more coffee* than I do. This is what it means to be a revelator of God's love (not just the coffee part).

Two years ago, at the Annual Meeting, we kicked off the process for exploring the idea of a capital campaign. We have made a lot of progress, received a tremendous amount of feedback, have committed to moving forward in 2020, and are still in the process of determining what projects we will focus on in light of congregational priorities and what we think we can raise. Our 2020 Cornerstone Campaign will come into focus in the months ahead. But in the meantime, as the process continues to evolve, I remain incredibly grateful to everyone who cares so deeply about the future of this church. For all who participated in the feedback process, to the members of our Building Committee and Vestry for their continued leadership, and to all of you who make the mission of St. John's part of your life. This is what it means to be a revelator of God's love.

Time precludes me from mentioning all the revelatory ministries at St. John's, but I did want to highlight a few that have marked 2019. I certainly could have mentioned many others and much of this work is contained in the Annual Report itself, which will be available after the service. But all of this — and all of *you* — are what knit St. John's together into a beautiful tapestry of a faithful, thriving, and joyful parish.

Looking forward, there will be several staff transitions at St. John's in the coming year. Our longest serving staff member, our amazing sexton, Dorothy Manley will be retiring in June after 25 years among us. Our highly competent and ever-loyal administrative assistant Evelyn Czaja will also be retiring after 13 years. I am grateful for their service, as I know you all are, and they will be missed. This will leave a void here but also gives us an opportunity to rethink these positions based on our current needs and our mission moving forward.

I remain so grateful to the lay leadership of St. John's, from committee chairs to Vestry leaders to those who serve in various ministries in ways both seen and unseen. We don't just go to church, we *are* the church. And everyone here does so much to build up the body of Christ. From your prayers and presence to financial generosity to volunteer hours there are so many ways to serve at St. John's. And I know I don't say this often enough but a) thank you and b) if there is a ministry you see that you would like to get involved in, please do reach out to me. Ministry opportunities shrouded in mystery are not how we like to do business around here, but I realize it can unintentionally come across that way sometimes.

That old song John the Revelator is in the call and response style brought over by enslaved Africans and which found voice on Southern plantations. And call and response is a helpful way to think about how we can all serve as revelators of God's love. Jesus invites us to encourage one another, to lift one another's burdens, and to bring life and light to the world. Call and response. We listen to God's call and then we respond to it, as individuals and as a community.

My friends in Christ, it remains a privilege to follow Jesus alongside each and every one of you. To proclaim Jesus in Word and Sacrament as a fellow pilgrim on this journey of life and faith. May God bless us all in the year ahead.