

## From the Rector:

As I reflect today (September 30<sup>th</sup>), I realize that in about 10 days we will once more be celebrating Harvest Thanksgiving in our nation. Traditionally this is a time when we pause collectively to give God thanks for all our blessings in life. As a nation consumed with maneuvering this global pandemic we have found ourselves in for the past 19 months, giving thanks might not be weighing heavily on our minds as it once did. It is not that we are any less thankful but rather our time and energy is consumed with anxiety and worry, especially as we try to stay safe and keep our families and communities safe as well. After all these months we can understand if some are worn down, tired and even depressed. It has been an emotional rollercoaster as we go from optimism when Covid and its variants are almost non-existent in our province, to disappointment when we see outbreaks of it in areas of the province, as we saw in the past couple of weeks in Central Newfoundland. We also had our 8<sup>th</sup> death from Covid from this outbreak. We have become so totally immersed in this pandemic environment that we keenly feel the pain and sorrow of those who suffer from this virus. That is a good thing because we are called to help carry one another's burdens, to feel one another's pain and sorrow; that is one of the marks of Christians living in community. I have no doubt that prayer and support of others, even those we have never met, have made an indelible and positive mark on the world in these times. We are very thankful to those who lift us up in prayer, the world has never needed more prayer warriors than now.

So, as we approach Thanksgiving Day this year, what will we be giving thanks for? Here in the parish of St. Philip's I am very thankful that in the past year, and more especially in the past few months, we have been able to slowly and very carefully begin to rebuild our parish and community life. It was around the time of Thanksgiving last year (2020) that we were able to reopen our church building to indoor worship after a period of about 7 months of closure. We are thankful that, by strictly following the protocols set down for us by our Chief Medical Officer, and our Diocesan Covid-19 Task Force, we have been able to come together as a parish family to worship together, to break bread together and support one another in unusual times and circumstances. I realize that not everyone has returned to in-church worship yet, and I pray that in time they will feel safe enough to do so. It is perhaps the biggest reason I still continue to live-stream the 10:30 am worship each week on Facebook.

Being "thankful" is at the very heart of the Gospel and Christian living. I love this scripture verse from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 *Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* I realize this is the ideal and may be much harder to do than to say, especially in the last 19 months. When Paul wrote this to the Thessalonians he was sending them a letter of encouragement in the midst of a very difficult time to be a new Christian in an anti-Christian society. To be a Christian in that place at that time was very dangerous and deadly. Whatever circumstance we might find ourselves in at the present moment this scripture verse is still relevant and timely. Another lovely verse I think of for thanksgiving is from Paul's letter to the Philippians 4:4-7 *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* I think it has meant much to us all in these pandemic times to be reminded that no matter the darkness, no matter the fear, despair and anxiety, God has been present to us and our steadfast faith has been key to getting to where we are now. The acts of kindness by others, even strangers, the compassion and care shown by our healthcare workers, the willingness of others to put themselves at risk to serve us, from our doctors and nurses to the worker checking us in at the grocery store, have been exemplary. That's what we need to celebrate this Thanksgiving, that the Lord has been near indeed. Not only in spirit but also in the hearts, hands and feet of those who have worked very hard to keep us safe and well. We often hear the words that on

earth God has no heart, mind, eyes, ears, hands and feet except in us. I think we have seen and experienced that over and over again in this pandemic. I invite you on October 11<sup>th</sup> to pause for a moment or two just to thank God and to ask God to bless those who have served us so faithfully and so well for so long.

Rev. Randy