

## **Sermon for Christ Church Ithan: God's Grace at Work in and Through You**

Be strong and courageous.

Do not be frightened or dismayed,

For the power of the Lord God is in you and with you, wherever you go.

### **Introduction: A Word of Thanks**

I give thanks to God for this day

And for this opportunity to worship God with you all this evening.

It's a great honor to stand before you as the preacher for this celebration of new ministry

For this magnificent community of faith, for you blessed people of Christ Church

And for the institution of my friend and brother,

The Rev. Dr. Kevin J. Moroney, as your Rector.

It's a great honor because our parishes are not only close in proximity

But Christ Church and St. David's share so much in common.

We share one Lord, we share a common faith, a common tradition,

A rich history

And now a common calling in a world that is in dire need of the knowledge

And the experience of the saving love that is ours in Christ Jesus.

So, I give special thanks to God this evening as a guest preacher

For this opportunity to encourage you all in this new phase of ministry

That you all now take up together in the name of our Lord.

For though our friend Kevin has his name in a lot of places in the bulletin

And will have a strong supporting role in this community in the coming years

A supporting role that will often look like the main role;

This liturgy, this service of worship, is an opportunity to remind you

That you are all beginning a new phase of life with God and for God.

For the church, this church, Christ Church Ithan has been called together by God

Called together to share in Christ's ministry;  
Called together to allow God to touch and change and mould each of your lives  
So that you may become the persons God intends for you to be.

Called together by God so that this community, all of you  
May become Christ to the world by your gracious, giving love for one another;  
By your witness to those who come looking for God here;  
And by your commitment to merely help God change the world.

For that's what God has called us to in this Christian life;  
To be changed or transformed by God  
And to be the agents of change and transformation in the world;  
No small task.

And so this evening, as you all celebrate a new beginning and a renewed life of ministry  
I have a challenge for you all;  
I have gifts to offer;  
And I have a charge for you and your new Rector.

### **The Challenge**

First, the challenge.

In the 1980's the author and social commentator Og Mandino wrote

That no life is great until it is focused;  
That nothing of any lasting value can be accomplished;  
That no great change can come about, no movement succeed  
Unless a person or community has a singular focus.

No life is great until it is focused means that a person or a community  
Needs to have one overriding principle,  
Have one singular idea,  
Take one overarching approach that colors and touches and affects  
Everything that person or that community does.

Consider some of the great individuals of history, King, Gandhi, Mother Teresa  
Or some of the great cultures and nations that have arisen, Greece, Rome, America  
Or some of the great businesses and how a single idea, a single principle  
Grasped them and then grasped others to change the world;  
All because of their singular focus.

And the opposite is true as well,  
When a person or a business or a community loses their singular focus,  
Then not only do they miss out on greatness,  
But they also fall apart, fail, and the world passes them by.

If the great railroad companies of a hundred years ago in United States  
Had remembered that they were in the transportation business  
Rather than the railroad business,  
Then we'd be driving Reading Town Cars and Vanderbilt SUV's,  
Rather than Fords and Chryslers and General Motors Cars;  
We'd be flying on Air Chesapeake and Ohio.

If Sports Illustrated had remembered that they were in the sports information business  
And not in the sports magazine business,  
Then we'd be watching Sports Illustrated Network instead of ESPN;  
Though I think the initials SIN (sin) might have needed some work  
Before becoming the call letters.

And what's true of individuals and empires and businesses is true of the Church;  
When a church, a national or a local church, has a singular focus  
Then some incredible and wonderful things start happening.  
Consider those first followers of Jesus and their singular focus  
On being followers of Christ and helping others become followers.  
From a small number, billions and billions have come to believe  
And the world has never been the same.

But when a church loses it's focus, which is pretty easy to do, by the way,  
When it forgets why it's really here, why it exists at all  
Then the community falls apart and the world passes it by.

That's happened in all of our churches at one time or another;  
And the reality is that it's happening in our beloved Episcopal Church right now  
As we decline in vision, in numbers and in effectiveness  
On a local scale and on a national scale;  
Divided and distracted by our inability to focus on the one thing.

The challenge for you and for me as individual followers of Jesus  
The challenge for this community of Christ Church Ithan,  
The challenge for us as a broader communion of faith  
Is to focus and refocus our attention on the one thing,  
On the one overarching principle  
That will color and touch and affect everything we do.

And the single focus, and you all can wordsmith this however you want;  
The single focus is for us to remember the love God has for each of us in Christ Jesus,  
And then to live as if that mattered.

To live a life and to build a community here  
So filled with the love of God, so filled with a love for others  
That this place becomes known as a community of love;  
Because of the way you all love one another as Christ Church.

It starts here.

Not only with your new Rector, but also with each one of you.

And though it's a daunting challenge to keep focused on the love of God in your life here  
And to love imperfect people who may sit next to you in Church  
Or even part of your own family

It's a challenge that comes with the promise and power of God's love

Working in us and through us;

It's a challenge that comes with gifts that ensure we cannot fail.

### **The Gifts**

Secondly, I said I have gifts to share with you and I do,

Though the gifts are not mine to give, but I want you to be aware of them,

Because they come with the promise of the calling of Kevin Moroney

And because they are promised to each of us by the grace of God.

You all are blessed to have Kevin Moroney as your Rector

And perhaps even more blessed by the presence and grace of his wife, Rose,

And their beautiful daughters, Elsa and Maggie; and, of course Lucy – dog

Kevin brings many gifts as your Rector:

Some of them you may have noticed already: his skills as preacher, teacher, pastor

His skills as a musician and a liturgist.

Others will emerge as you all grow together in worship and ministry.

And of all the things that may emerge in the coming years,

I can promise you that Kevin will always love you;

I can promise that it will never be boring;

And I can promise that Kevin loves a challenge, so be careful.

Now Kevin is a gracious competitor when it comes to a challenge,

But don't even let yourself fall into the trap of thinking you're going to win:

Be it remembering baseball or Beatles trivia, playing softball,

Coming up with the best witticism or a running practical joke;

Or just about any other kind of fun.

Kevin will accept a challenge and he will keep at it until he has used all his best gifts

Or until someone gives in and it will rarely be Kevin.

I'm sure you'll hear more than you may want to hear over the years  
About Kevin rising to the challenge of completing his doctorate;  
We, at St. David's, especially the staff in the hallway outside his office  
Are keenly aware of the challenges he faced and the way Kevin rose to it.

However, my favorite example of Kevin rising to a challenge is a little lighter  
And came a couple of years ago  
When Kevin was invited to throw out the first pitch at a Phillies game.

Kevin prepared for weeks in advance, throwing, stretching,  
Trying to decide whether to throw an off-speed pitch  
Or a fastball that would sting the hand of the Phillie Phanatic.

Now, most people who are invited to throw out the first pitch at Citizen's Bank Park  
Stand somewhere in front of the mound and make a short toss  
To the Phanatic just hoping it will get there, but not Kevin.

When his turn came, Kevin had no intention of making a short toss  
But walked up to the pitcher's mound, dug his heel into the dirt  
Put his foot on the pitching rubber  
And fired a strike that nearly knocked the Phanatic over;  
The man loves a challenge.

Kevin has many, many gifts to offer as your Rector, but he doesn't have all the gifts.

Just as Kevin Moroney has been given gifts to serve as Rector of Christ Church Ithan  
In an effective and loving way far beyond his natural abilities;  
So every one of you has been given gifts by the grace of God  
To build this community of love  
And to expand it's reach far beyond these walls.

St. Paul has an intense understanding that the nature of Christian community,  
Begins in the love of Christ,  
And that the community of the church is empowered by God  
With gifts that are given to individuals with a purpose.

The gifts are different for each person  
And every one of these gifts is needed to make this community grow in love,  
To assist this community in becoming the place where God's love dwells,  
To help people just like you and me  
To live our lives as Christ's body, to live as the church.

In other words, being a Christian is not a spectator sport;  
Oh, there are times when we need to rest in the love of God and community;  
To feel God's healing grace and comfort and to be renewed;  
But that is never the ultimate goal.

God's healing and comfort and grace are given to us  
So we can exercise our gifts here and in the world;  
And exercise them we must, if we are to build a community of love  
And make a difference.

And whatever gifts you've been given, showy or quiet, personal or public  
You are called to use your gifts to build up the church  
And live into Christ' Church's singular focus and mission.

Now that may seem daunting and overly challenging to some of us  
Who have quieter, less showy gifts, so let me tell you my favorite story  
Of a person making a difference with a very small gift.

One of my close friends in college took over a church in Wisconsin in the 1990's,  
And one of the elderly members was a person everyone called Mr. Dan.

Mr. Dan was not the brightest person in the church,  
Was never elected to the Vestry or asked to speak or teach or lead annual stewardship

His only job at the church was to stand at the door of the Sunday school building  
And welcome the children.

He gave them a smile; welcomed most of them by name,  
And then wandered off to the coffee hour before returning home.

After less than a year of serving that church, Mr. Dan died,  
And my friend Brian expected a fairly small funeral for this quiet, unassuming man  
But when he got to the church, an hour before the service,  
The parking lot was full and there were license plates from all over the Midwest.

The church itself was packed to celebrate the life of Mr. Dan  
And afterwards, at the reception, Brian asked some of these grown men and women,  
Who had traveled great distances to honor Mr. Dan why they had come.  
And almost to a person, they responded that Mr. Dan's smile  
And his gentle welcome made them feel loved by God  
And they had never forgotten him.

We have all been given gifts by God to build up the community of the church.  
Kevin Moroney has been given gifts,            You have been given gifts  
And God is calling you to use them to be the church and to reach out to others,  
To live and act with the single focus of being a community of God's love  
And you will, when you use God's gifts.

**The Charge**

The challenge is before you and you have all the gifts to ensure that you all cannot fail;  
And so now I will give you the charge.

When Kevin and Bishop Michel and many of the other clergy here this evening  
Were ordained to the priesthood,

Many of us were asked to stand at the end of the ordination sermon

To receive a charge, a purpose, just prior to the laying on of hands.

And since Kevin, as the spiritual leader, has already experienced something like this,

For his ministry as a priest in the Episcopal Church.

I want all of you to stand with Kevin to receive a charge on this day  
Of celebration of new ministry and institution. Go ahead stand up.

On this night, in the name of Jesus Christ, in the name of our loving Lord,

I appoint you to build up this Christian community of Christ Church, Ithan;

To know the love of God for your own life,

And to use the gifts God has given you for this community;

That this place may be a source of light and life and love.

And I send you forth in Jesus' name into a world

In need of the love you know and will know in this place.

Never forget that each one of you and all of us together

Have been called and sent forth by our Lord

To use our lives to build this community of love

And to make the love of God in Christ known to the world.

Be strong and courageous.

Do not be frightened or dismayed,

For the power of the Lord God is in you wherever you go. Amen.