**LORD, I ASK THAT YOU BE MY STRENGTH FOR THE JOURNEY**

A homily by Linda Moosick, Clerk of the Vestry

for Vestry Sunday, March 12, 2017

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Bedford MA

It was a Friday night in Dec. before the Advent Fair, the church was busy with furniture being moved, tables pulled out of the closet and set up, there was high energy in the air in anticipation of the big day. I was in the parish hall doing my thing when Emily Mitchell, who was the Vestry Warden at that time, came up to me and said,

**“Linda, can I have a word with you in private?”**

**OMG**, I was being called to the principal’s office, what had I done? I knew I hadn’t cheated on a test since I hadn’t had a test. Did I offend someone, hurt someone’s feelings, was my singing that bad that they wanted me off of the choir? I followed Emily into one of the class rooms and was instantly transported back in time to elementary school, waiting for my parents to walk in.

She asked me if I would consider joining the Vestry and being the clerk. She thought I would be a good fit; I was organized, I was the music librarian for the choir and I was a member of St. Paul’s for some time. I felt like the weight of the world was lifted from my shoulders. **Clerk?** That’s all she wanted? I was not going to have to write 500 times on the black board “I will not chew gum in class.” After about an hour of giving it some thought, I said yes; how hard could it be and it was only for a year or two. By the second or third Vestry meeting I was beginning to think I had made a big mistake. I had little computer skills, my spelling which has always been horrible, made it very difficult to read my own notes. But I did have faith that God would be with me at each meeting and help correct my errors. In my sixth year, he is still my right-hand man.

My mother had an emotional breakdown when her dad died, she left us and went to Indiana when I was 11; I was the oldest of 3 girls. My father, who was Eastern Orthodox, always made sure we went to church and received our sacraments; to marry my mother, he had to agree to raise us Catholic. In the 50’s it was rather uncommon for a man to have custody of his children and the Children’s Welfare Dept.? was going to make a visit to our home to make sure we were in good hands. I remember hearing my dad crying, once we were all in bed, what were his chances of keeping us when he had to work 2 jobs, our hair usually was matted and we depended on my grandmother to make us Easter coats? What was an 11-year-old girl to do?

I went to church and lit candles. I had no idea why people lit the candles but I knew it had something to do with praying to God and that was what I needed to do. I even knocked on the rectory door to see if one of the priest would speak with me-----he did. I did not realize it at that age but I was trying to have “faith”. God would not take us away from dad.

Growing up I kept pretty much to myself. I didn’t belong to any school clubs or organizations, I was an introvert and I had a bad stuttering problem which kept me from joining in; it also kept me from getting jobs after high school. One day I had a big fight with God-----I was fed up------I had it. **“Why did you** **make me like this?”** I screamed, I swore, I hated God. He didn’t exist---it was all a big lie. No one was home so I could really let my hair down and I did. It wasn’t until several years later that I realized I was no longer stuttering. Once age and maturity started to settle in I came to see that when I was at the end of my rope, God took it off my shoulders and placed it on his-----as he has promised.

I had about a 20-year period in my life where I didn’t belong to any church, I wasn’t even sure if I believed in anything, only birth and death. But I always found myself praying, thanking God for the beautiful sunset or sitting on the edge of a gorge in the White Mountains amazed at the beautiful creation. Faith was still working in me.

We heard a lot about faith and the Holy Spirit in today’s readings. I wonder how Abraham and Nicodemus understood “faith”, what questions did they have? They couldn’t go to Google for information. One of my grandchildren asked me one day “what is faith”? I said faith was believing when you can’t see anything but you know in your heart it is there-------that is how I look at faith. Every once in a while, the Spirit nudges you as a reminder that we are living in faith. I have been very fortunate to have times in my life when the Spirit made its presence known to me------I’m sure many of you have had that experience. I have always been left with a feeling of peace and calm for days and like that beautiful hymn, we love “How Can I Keep From Singing”, I like to say **How Can I Keep From Praying?**

Whether the Spirit comes to you in a dream, in the form of a white dove, a boy playing a harmonica or in Emily for having faith in me, we all can be sure we are never alone. Amen