

The 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost 4 September 2022  
Saint Aidan's Episcopal Church, Gresham OR  
The Rev'd Canon Raggs Ragan

In the Name of the one holy and living God.

Thank you for welcoming me into this beginning of your transition time.

I am Raggs Ragan, glad to be called Mother Raggs or just Raggs. I will be leading worship for the four Sundays of September. This is a gentle transition into the time of serious re-examination and discovery of the path forward.

This is a time of change for Saint Aidan's, time for openness for new things, new opportunities, but it requires open eyes to see. Today's readings give us some helpful guideposts in the midst of sometimes rather aggressive language.

The Collect reminds us not to trust in our own strength, but always in God's mercy, that is God's eternally reliable love for each and all of us. It gives us encouragement to open our eyes and hearts and minds to an unfolding future.

Jeremiah gives us a picture of the process of creating pottery, which involves throwing and molding, turning and remaking, lots of evolution in the strong hands of God. Trusting that process can be challenging. We humans seem to be much more comfortable staying as we are, rather than being changed, but we are reminded that change is part of creation, always. I was reminded this week about how many great spiritual writers have found their way into seeing God in their lives by looking at ordinary things of their lives with new eyes – ordinary things as the neighborhood potter would have been in Jeremiah's day. Now is a new opportunity for the Saint Aidan's community to open our eyes to see the hand of God at work, perhaps subtly and quietly, among and around us.

Then Psalm 139 memorably reminds us that God knows us each and all, inside and out. There is nothing in us or around us or ahead of us that is unknown to God. God knows Saint Aidan's, knows everyone and everything here, all the possibilities. That is the most reassuring of today's readings to me.

In the letter to Philemon, we are reminded that it is possible to change how we see people, to change our relationships. Onesimus was seen as a slave, a tool, a useful possession owned by Philemon. Then Paul met him in prison, a fellow prisoner for the sake of the Gospel – and came to see him as a brother. In the letter Paul invites his friend (and Onesimus' owner) to see him that way as well, to open his eyes to discover his brother, to live in love. We see here how the great persecution of the early Church gave opportunity to build up God's community of love. That was a terrible time of suffering, but extraordinary growth happened in the midst of the turmoil. This transition time will be full of opportunities to discover new gifts in the community and in one another, new opportunities to grow in love and service.

The Gospel reading is probably the hardest to listen to, because it seems to be filled with violent rejection, with 'hate'. It includes some of what have traditionally been called the 'hard sayings' of Jesus. Is Jesus really calling us to hate anyone, let alone the ones we love most? Is he really asking us to abandon everything we cherish?

Above all things, we know that God-in-Christ is all about love, that love is the fabric of the universe. So the hate being talked about cannot be that rejection of the other which is the opposite of love. So what does it mean in this context? Some people talk about idolatry as putting anything else in the place in our hearts and lives where only God belongs. With this lens one can see this hating not as rejecting or wishing harm or even destruction to family and property and relationships and occupations, but rather as ejecting them from the center of our lives where only God who is love belongs. Our central relationship is with God, the source of all life and love, so anything that displaces that relationship needs to be moved out of the center, which can in fact be very hard to do, but very worthwhile. When we loose our iron grip on all that we fear to lose, then our hands can be open to receive what God gives. This is important to remember as this community is letting go of my lovely friend, Mother Esme, allowing her the freedom to discover where God is calling her next, and allowing yourselves the freedom to see and hear and learn where God is calling this community.

One of my favorite images for our life with God comes from nature. Some flowers, like dandelions and thistles, provide their seeds with wonderful parachutes of fluff, so that they can be carried on the wind far away

from their original plant to grow in a whole new place. That is how I understand our relationship with God's Spirit. We exist wherever we are, in our places and jobs and relationships, as the seed has developed within the flower, gradually growing and changing, even delighting in being there, but one day the wind comes and catches in our fluff and carries us off who knows where. It could be near or very far. It could be a fertile, wonderful, tilled garden or a rocky outcrop. We let go of whatever went before and open ourselves to the new, whatever it may be. We are called, like those seeds, to live always ready to let go, to be open to the new opportunities and adventures. The key is not holding on to what we know, being ready to float and fly and see where God takes us. That is my wish for you.

Shortly after I was invited to spend these Sundays with you, the marvelous website *Journey with Jesus* included a poem that I immediately knew I wanted to share with all of you. It is by Edwina Gateley

*Called to Become* [From Edwina Gateley, *There Was No Path So I Trod One*(1996, 2013)]

You are called to become	Should dispel your spark.
A perfect creation.	For the Lord delights in you.
No one is called to become	Jealously looks upon you
Who you are called to be.	And encourages with gentle joy
It does not matter	Every movement of the Spirit
How short or tall	Within you.
Or thick-set or slow	Unique and loved you stand.
You may be.	Beautiful or stunted in your growth
It does not matter	But never without hope and life.
Whether you sparkle with life	For you are called to become
Or are as silent as a still pool.	A perfect creation.
Whether you sing your song aloud	This becoming may be
Or weep alone in darkness.	Gentle or harsh.
It does not matter	Subtle or violent.
Whether you feel loved and admired	But it never ceases.
Or unloved and alone	Never pauses or hesitates.
For you are called to become	Only is—
A perfect creation.	Creative force—
No one's shadow	Calling you
Should cloud your becoming.	Calling you to become
No one's light	A perfect creation.

I invite you all into this journey of becoming the perfect, evolving Saint Aidan's God is calling you to be. May we all be open to God's breath of love, God's call to become this new creation. Amen.