

Bill Glenn
Pledge talk 11/19/2023

My journey in the Episcopal Church has included extended stays at Grace Cathedral SF in the '90's, Incarnation Santa Rosa, in the 2000's, later, Bishop's Ranch in Healdsburg. But in 2008, I encountered what I call my Dark Wood.

On a given day, and for some years after, I found myself spiritually bereft, I felt the absence of the ineffable mystery I have known as God, I could find no consolation. This was a most challenging time for me, one who has spent his life panting after this presence, most singularly found in the person of Jesus, and in the Eucharist, in which that presence is made manifest. But it seemed withdrawn, gone, stilled.

I could not pray.

This went on for some time.

As the Spirit concluded this—I would say necessary— painful work in me, my interior life was slowly restored, but I felt alone in this journey.

Sometime later, my dear friend Pat Moore called me— we had been having lunch regularly as I wandered in this dark wood—and she said: *You might think about returning to Incarnation.* Why would she say that, I thought.

But I have come to know this is how the Spirit works: a word, a hint, a parched landscape, an intuition, an instruction, an invitation, then, silence.

Two years ago, on Maundy Thursday, I re-entered this Church, and *something happened. Something both startling and opaque.* I returned the next day, Good Friday, at the noon service with the Stations of the Cross, and the unbeknownst-to-me young rector asked me to read. A peculiar light was streaming in the stained-glass window near the third station as I read a shard of scripture.

When I left the church that afternoon, I found myself softly weeping, not quite knowing what was happening. I came back the next night for the Easter Vigil, and I kept coming back. One Sunday sometime later my friend Jamie said, *Why don't you come to Farlander after Mass instead of scooting out of here so fast?* To spite him, I did.

As I continue to do.

What I have found here at Incarnation Episcopal is the spiritual community I have been looking for since I left the Jesuit order forty-five years ago. That is, I have found you. And for you, and for this graced place, I am grateful.

I am grateful for the beauty and efficacy of the celebration of the Eucharist
for the intimate weekday liturgies on the high holy days of the EC calendar
for the penetrating, edifying and vital preaching, every single Sunday
for the wise, measured and soulful leadership of that not-quite-so-young rector
for this magnificent choir and its engaging director
for the warm and generous staff, assisting clergy and the committed Vestry
for the splendor of this redwood sanctuary

for the hospitality and fellowship that vivifies Farlander Hall
for Open Table, the clothing ministry, and all the ministries that flourish here
for the bold necessity of Imagine Incarnation
for the good humor that is so in evidence at Incarnation
for the sense of home I experience every time I enter this campus.

I am grateful for *the all of it*.

This place, this space, the Eucharist, and you, are of profound importance to me, the more so for the unforeseen embrace of my person and its effects on my soul.

So, I ask: Bill, what is the value of this gift you have received?

I know it is incalculable, though calculate we each must.

Today is the last Sunday of the pledge drive. So many beautiful, moving, and true testimonials have been shared. Our budget for this next year is being hashed out as I write these words. And that budget is fully *and only* determined by our generous support. But it all redounds to us.

On behalf of all of us, if you have not, I ask you to make your pledge today. If you have already made your pledge, I ask you—acknowledging your already generous gift— to re-consider that pledge, and if appropriate, enlarge your financial commitment, some notion *of tithe*, so we can hit our \$500,000 goal, to fully sustain this graced ministry, this beloved community.

When I opened *News and Notes* two weeks ago and read of the commitment Stephen and Julia have made, I was caught short. I had already pledged what I thought was a *stretchy* increase from the year prior. Yet I found myself so moved by their vulnerable sharing, by their thoughtful reasoning, and the personal calculation they made with this transformational gift, I had to re-think the whole darn thing.

The next day I sent a note to Inese and Joe and David and I upped my financial commitment to this community, with *a really stretchy* pledge. I recalibrated my pledge not only because of the financial challenges Incarnation must meet, but mostly because of how I hold Incarnation in my heart.

I have been *invited in*—by Incarnation, by Stephen, by you. As my Dark Wood ended, my ever-present companion Jesus, was waiting patiently for me, among other places, in most every nook of this sacred campus.