

Deacon's Report

To the people of God at St. Thomas':

I am writing these words during the liturgical season of Epiphany. I pause to think more deeply about what I am being invited to make visible. I wonder about the ways that we--in our individual lives and as the Body of Christ in Camden--are being called to manifest in word and deed the divinity of Jesus.

Since the last time I shared an update for our Annual Meeting, much has happened. Leading up to my husband Bill's death on March 9, 2020, he and I sought to stay very close to one another, and to our Good Shepherd. We were truly companioned by gifts of grace and practical help, making his end-of-life passage not only bearable, but life-giving.

With God's help I've made an effort day by day to be tender with my own grieving heart. Just after Bill's passing, I reached out to the SSJE monastic community on behalf of receiving spiritual direction. Through the wise and compassionate support of one of the brothers, I am discovering healing and hope amidst the sorrow.

Soul work of this kind also equips me in my vocational work as chaplain at Pen Bay Medical Center. Suffering can mold and equip us as human beings. Before a conversation or time of prayer with a patient I say "Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. Help me to make visible your healing love." I'm coming to discover that in trusting my own healing journey my capacity for being more fully present to the sufferings of others has deepened.

Healthcare spiritual care ministry during the pandemic's continuation has meant that apart from the last 24 hours of a person's life, I am the only clergy person at Pen Bay Medical Center. Visitor restriction policies are in place to try and help mitigate the spread of this tenacious virus. The primary place that I am living out my call to ordained ministry currently is in the halls and rooms of our local hospital.

Reverend Lisa's message at Christmas, as shared in *Tidings* has stayed with me. "*May the Prince of Peace heal you this day.*" She went on to help us understand that the oldest meaning of the word peace (Shalom in Hebrew) is "wholeness." I believe we are all invited each day to consider what hinders the manifestation of wholeness within us. In doing so the flow of divine flow can find an opening, and healing can happen. We are then able to be bearers of Christ's merciful love, in a world that is so deeply hungry for wholeness, and hope.

Being part of the Mid Coast Interfaith Alliance's New Year's Eve service of Remembrance, Resilience and Hope was transformative for me. Partnering and collaboration of this kind is so meaningful, and I believe it is part of what will help

heal the deep hurt in our nation. We drew upon Christian, Buddhist and Jewish teachings to lament the multi-layered “grief upon grief” that was present in 2020. And then we named our resilience and strength, both individual and collective, in being able to move forward together. Over 100 people attended this virtual event.

In early February I will partner with a local hospitalist physician to engage in a conversation entitled “Opening to Grace.” Sponsored by the Pastoral Care Committee at St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, we will consider how significant health events and grief of many kinds can be a portal for the discovery of healing and hope. In an upcoming issue of *Tidings* I will share further information—you are all welcome to join the conversation and time of sharing.

Respectfully,
The Rev. Abby Pettee