Malcolm Clemens Young Psalm 133

Grace Cathedral, San Francisco 2C20 1 John 1:1-2:2

Evensong 46 Charles Shipley Installation and Farewell 5:30 p.m. John 20:19-31

Thursday 28 April 2022

**Verger Charles Shipley’s Retirement**

“God is light and in him there is no darkness at all” (1 Jn. 1).

When all the ministers for a cathedral service are lined up and it is time, Charles Shipley looks you in the eye, nods his head, and almost under his breath he says, “let’s go.” Then he turns and we all walk into a mysterious, living stream that has flowed for centuries. We simply take that first step and eternity carries us forward, into the deepest places, into the very presence of God.

These processions remind me of a rip current that quickly and effortless conveys a surfer into a place that feels like paradise, another beautiful dimension. Today we celebrate Mr. Charles Shipley’s ministry at Grace Cathedral that began in December 1988. Today he will be installed as an honorary canon of the Cathedral and we will say “farewell.”

Mr. Shipley chose our readings. These include the story of Thomas’ encounter with the resurrected Jesus. It says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” And, “these [signs] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (Jn. 20). We all believe not because we have seen but because God has touched us through other people.

Mr. Shipley also chose the introduction to the First Letter of John. During our short time together this evening I want to say a little more about it. The three letters of John employ a similar vocabulary and style. Although they seem linguistically connected to the Gospel of John, they probably come from a different setting.

The writer of 2 and 3 John is identified as “the Elder.” He has responsibility for house churches of mostly Jewish followers in a region that could be somewhere near Ephesus. There has been a crisis. A group has broken away from the faithful. They argue that Jesus was not sent by God. The Elder writes with suggestions about what to do about this.

1 John is not really a letter nor is it a linear argument. It’s a sermon using a rhetorical structure called amplification. It keeps returning back to themes and further developing them. Through stark contrasts between love and hate, light and darkness, life and death, it reminds us how we might find meaning and happiness.

There are two main sections. The first asserts that God is light (1 Jn. 1:5-3:10). The second says that God is love (1 Jn. 3:11-5:17). These help us to know what to do. Actions and statements are of God if they are true, if they lead to more love and less division. The author cares deeply about the idea behind the Greek word koinōnia. This means fellowship. It means to participate, to share in a common project.

The Elder wants us to know that God is light. This helps us to see how through Jesus we share in the work of healing the world. Jesus in his sacrifice, in the way he loved others, shows us what God is like. You can ground your entire life on this idea – that God loves us and that we will only find fulfillment in caring for others.

For me Mr. Shipley exemplifies this way of life. He is humble and discrete. He recognizes our human faults and shortcomings but does not dwell on them. He looks for the good in everyone. He has been utterly dedicated to this Cathedral, to the people who serve here and to every visitor. He has taught me a great deal about being a dean.

Mr. Shipley is a kind of artist who passes on important traditions that strengthen the Cathedral. I don’t think I have ever met a more loyal person. Mr. Shipley constantly connects others. He’s always inviting people out to dinner and coffee. He has contributed so much to the pastoral care of souls here. I worry about the isolation many will feel after he leaves. Sometimes it is not easy to be the dean. I could not have asked for a better confidante, someone who I can trust with the frustrations and joys of this life.

In a letter Bishop Swing wrote this week he dwells mostly on Mr. Shipley’s sense of humor, how he managed to always walk softly while carrying a big stick. He said that being a verger is like carrying a huge pan filled to the top with boiling water and making sure that it is gracefully delivered without spilling even a drop.

Thank you Charles for your composure and good judgment. And for your service. Through you I have seen and come to believe more deeply. I will miss you very much.

My dear friends, “God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.” We have life through Jesus’ name. We believe through each other. Let us walk together in that mysterious, living stream that has flowed through the centuries. And we will let eternity carry us forward into the deepest places, into the very presence of God. Let’s go.

Note from Mark Stanger:

Values: love of God, loyalty to the church and its ministers, Christian witness in pastoral care and respectful hospitality, love and respect for service workers, loyalty and generosity in friendships, love of liturgical music, near-endless supply of Dad jokes, appreciation of courtesy and custom, strings-free interest in others, a true Mensch, .... and I'm just scratching the surface

Humble in spiritual realm....Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief (cf. Thomas gospel and final hymn). Faithful steward of Grace Cathedral, not just the cathedral church but its people, history .legacy, future, reputation, relationship with neighborhood.....

Letter from Bishop William Swing:

“On March 30, 2022, Charles Shipley greeted me at Grace with graciousness. And with the familiar patter about being the rush chairman of his fraternity and how swell it was to have me visit the house – but that is another story. It turns out that March 30, 2022, will be the final time that I ever walk into the Cathedral and experience his genuinely warm welcome. When I think of that, my heart drops with regret and at the same time, leaps in utter appreciation.

For many years of my time at Grace, the Chief Verger was Charles Agnew. Now he was an institution. An old fashioned man with more clocks than . . . We still have one of his clocks in our San Mateo condo. Occasionally we wind it up. Then it makes so much noise and rings so loudly on the hour, that we let it run down and stay quiet for enough years for us to forget the racket. Then we wind it up in innocence again, and thank Charles Agnew.

Then came Vergers who all had heart and flair. One of them, armed with only a knife, jumped on the back of a wild boar and lived to tell the tale. That couldn’t be said of the boar.

Then from Kansas, with a car worthy of My Cousin Vinny, came Charles Shipley. Being a Verger is like carrying a pan, full to the top, of water and making sure that nothing spilled and that it arrived at its destination in pristine shape. Charles Shipley was Mr. Equilibrium. With delicious humor. With unflappable faith buried under piles of vestments.

He “walked softly and carried a big stick. ”And a little slice of the Kingdom of Heaven was far better off for his deliberate strides of Grace.”

Thank you, Charles, for an honorable vocation.

With love from the Swing Set – Mary and Bill

Mary Carter:
Charles is also a great connector of people. He remembers people’s names and their interests and experiences, then introduces people to a potential friends and contacts with similarities. He is a gracious guide in the vestry and in helping prepare servers for services. He is the first to invite someone to a meal or to offer a ride. His knowledge and love of the cathedral is legendary. His happy humming and always polished shoes will be greatly missed.