

FaithWorks Sermon for Sunday, November 28, 2010

Presented to Holy Family, Heart Lake

Peter Misiaszek CFRE, Director of Stewardship Development

Thank you for welcoming me to Holy Family this morning. I'm Peter Misiaszek, Director of Stewardship Development for the Anglican Diocese of Toronto. It's my first visit to your parish so let me express my thanks for your support of FaithWorks. Your contributions are making a real difference in the lives of many and on their behalf, as well as the staff and volunteers of the ministries you support through your gifts to FaithWorks, I thank you.

Advent is a time to practice waiting. It's a time to await the celebration of the Savior coming into the world, and it's a time to anticipate his coming again. The world rushes into Christmas, getting caught up in the smells and bells of the season. And since we are part of the world, we get caught up into the commotion of Christmas as well. No wonder we are surprised when we show up on the First Sunday in Advent and there are no carols sung. Because the church moves slowly, taking time to consider what Christmas means. We wait, and watch, and consider how his coming changed the course of human history, and how his Second Coming will change us again. And like those first century Jews, we are reminded of Matthew's call to get ready...so that we don't miss his coming...so that we aren't surprised...caught off guard and unprepared to welcome the Son of God to into our midst. This is Advent; a word which is derived from the root word "adventure." Something is coming, something is about to unfold. Are you ready?

And the gospel lesson today, then, is the theme of Advent in six words: Here he comes, ready or not! It begins by Jesus telling us that nobody knows when the Second Coming will occur. The angels in heaven – whom you would think would be in the loop about this sort of thing – are clueless. They don't know when Jesus is coming back. And then Jesus says that he is clueless, too. Not even Jesus knows when the end is going to occur. This single verse in scripture ought to tell all the predictors and the prognosticators that they are foolish to try and figure out when the last day will come. Many people have tried, and they've all been wrong, because nobody knows.

So the message in this verse is that we should always be ready. Since we don't know when Jesus will arrive, we ought to live our lives in such a way that, on any given day, if he shows up, he will find us faithful to him. That is not to say that we must be studying the bible the moment he arrives. It is not to say that he must find us singing hymns when he comes.

So what DOES it mean, to be ready for his coming? It means that we live our lives in such a way that Jesus is our only hope. That we don't spend our lives thinking money will save us, or power

will save us, or fame, or reputation, or intelligence, or even kindness and generosity. If we truly believe that faith in Christ is the only currency that will get us to eternal life, then we won't spend our lives chasing those things that have no meaning in heaven.

Today's gospel, marking the beginning of the new Church year, sounds pretty scary! Jesus reminds us that things can change very quickly and that there is a need to stay alert. As one who wants to live as a faithful steward, how does my life show that I am alert and participating in bringing God's dream for creation to reality?

Jesus' parable of patient waiting and hopefulness finds meaning in the work of our FaithWorks community ministries and Partners. These organizations provide unconditional love to some of the most vulnerable members of our communities. They provide help and hope to thousands of individuals and families who are caught up in the seemingly overwhelming challenges of homelessness, domestic violence, terminal illness or the enormous pressures facing today's youth.

FaithWorks enables us to respond to God's mission to bring healing to a broken and suffering world. Over the past 15 years FaithWorks has contributed nearly \$18 million to support the work of our Community Ministries and Partners. These organizations are working in every corner of the diocese, providing outreach to families in crisis...children, youth and women in need... the homeless, refugees, prisoners and those with terminal illness or special needs...and those living in the developing world. Each ministry is run by compassionate and well-trained staff and volunteers who understand the needs of those whom they serve and who are committed to making a difference in their lives.

FaithWorks is grounded in our Baptismal covenant "to seek and serve Christ in all persons, and to strive for justice and peace...respecting the dignity of every human being." FaithWorks does not overcome the challenges of modern society, but helps to ensure that those who are in need have a place to find rest, refreshment and the courage to continue onward.

I'd like to tell you about Rick. When Rick was 16 years old he suffered a traumatic head injury as a result of a bicycle accident. He lost his vision and, out of anger and frustration, he burned many bridges. After a time Rick wound up on the streets where he survived by panhandling and dumpster diving. His family and friends felt powerless to help and to them, Rick was as good as dead. He was alone, angry and had no hope for the future. But one day, Rick wandered into the David Busby Street Centre in Barrie, one of our FaithWorks Community Ministries. Now it may come as a bit of a surprise but homelessness is not just a big city problem. In fact, the David Busby Centre serves as many as 200 people every day, offering refuge from the streets, shelters, and inadequate housing. Rick found acceptance and support. The counselors helped him access

social services and apply for subsidized housing. Rick's life began to turn around and, recognizing that he could not have done it without the hand up he received from the David Busby Centre, decided he wanted to give something back. Today, Rick is a regular volunteer at the David Busby Centre and speaks to youth groups and schools about the importance of bicycle helmet safety.

Together with twelve other Community Ministries, The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, the Anglican Appeal and LOFT Community Services, the David Busby Centre offers help and hope to thousands of our sisters and brothers whom otherwise might have nowhere to turn.

So what is FaithWorks?

It is the annual federated appeal of the Anglican Diocese of Toronto. Think of it like an Anglican "United Way" appeal where WE WHO ARE MANY ARE ONE BODY. We come together to share our blessings with others who are less fortunate. Because the needs are so great and each community is unique, we trust our community ministries and partner agencies to know and understand the needs of those they serve. We trust them to provide support, services and guidance without discrimination. And we respond when they ask us for our gifts of time, talent and treasure, along with our prayers, to support them in their ministry.

FaithWorks is the only source of unrestricted income available to many of these organizations. Your support enables them to do what they do best, and not be trapped in an endless cycle of writing grant proposals for special projects that are no longer funded once the grant runs out. FaithWorks is truly the lifeblood of the ministries it supports.

This year the need is greater than it has ever been and our campaign goal is higher than ever before. We have set ourselves a goal of \$1.55 million which is an 8% increase over our 2009 result.

Last year Holy Family raised slightly more than \$3,500 for FaithWorks – about 2.5% of your parish offertory. Now, at the risk of wearing out my welcome, I wonder if it would be possible to dig a little deeper and aim for a goal of \$7,000 which would be about 5% of your offertory. This seems like a huge increase, I know. But it only represents the same guideline that we encourage parishes across the diocese to strive for.

God has given us the gifts to make a difference and when we use these gifts in Christian service to others we begin to bring about the kingdom of God on Earth. And as we come together with our sisters and brothers across the diocese in support of our FaithWorks Ministries and partners, let us be mindful of the words of St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians that it is indeed "God's

power working in us that can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.”

As you leave here this morning, and no matter how intractable the challenges seem to be let these words be a blessing and give you hope for a future where we think not about scarcity, but about abundance. And please remember those who are in need with your gifts of prayer and financial support.

Amen.