

Tim Holt's Homily – October 30, 2011

Good morning! I was asked this past month to come up here and speak. As some of you remember, I have not been in this position since my senior year of high school during Youth Group Sunday. That was a special moment for me, and I have certainly been on an unpredictable journey since then. I remember the speech very well, and always think of how special everyone made me feel following the service. So, obviously, I was honored to come up here to speak again.

One reason why I agreed to talk to today was of how significant the church has been to me throughout my life. I have not come as much over the past few years. I was in college, lived in New York, went back to college, lived at the Diamond as I worked for the Richmond Flying Squirrels, then moved to Northern Virginia this past year. It felt so nice to come back a few Sundays ago. I felt like I was on the show, Cheers.

**Making your way in the world today takes everything you've got.
Taking a break from all your worries, sure would help a lot.**

Wouldn't you like to get away? Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came. You wanna be where you can see, our troubles are all the same. You wanna be where everybody knows Your name.

As some of you may remember, I spent a lot of time growing up involved in activities associated with the Episcopal Diocese. I went to Saint George's camp. I'm what you would call "A LIFER." I spent eight years – the full amount – at that camp, and then went to Senior High Youth Conference the following summers until college. I was also counselor at Soccer Camp. At JMU, I was an active member in Canterbury, the on-campus Episcopal campus ministry. I frequently visited Shrine Mont since it was only a few miles down the road. Places like Shrine Mont positively shaped my life and made me realize how important this religious support system is to my life. Many people my age don't see the significance of this support system yet.

I have noticed that I don't see many people my age at this church, except on the major Easter and Christmas holidays. This drop can be attributed to the recession. There aren't many jobs in Ashland, and people go elsewhere to find work, whether it's DC, New York, Charlotte, or even in another country. Even if younger people stay in the Richmond area for work, how many people my age want to drive half an hour on a Sunday morning to come to church? That list of dedicated individuals is dwindling, but those people are out there. We just need to give ourselves the opportunity to find them.

We have to decide what direction we want this church to go in. Do we want to keep it at the same size? Get younger? Grow in size over the next year, five years, or even ten years? All of these are valid questions to ensuring that we keep this church alive and thriving for the next generation.

One solution is reaching out to the Randolph Macon community. I know that this church has done that in the past, but there is no reason not to try again. Some people might even say, "Why do we want to reach out to college kids? They'll just be gone in four years?" Having younger people in church for four years, even if it's a few Sundays here are there, it's getting more exposure for Saint James the Less. If two college

students come to service, that experience could bring them back or even have them bring more friends.

Ensuring that they come to church more often is not just inviting them to Sunday service. With all of the weekend options out there, we need to take that extra step. Whether it's organizing functions for students throughout the week at places around Ashland, having a weekly talk session with Randolph Macon students on campus or at this church, or just hanging out with some of them. I know that I could connect with those students because I am a recent college grad who understands exactly what they are going through right now.

“Oh my goodness, I am in a new place with all of these new people. What's my major going to be? My roommate smells and needs to take a shower. What will I do after graduation?”

We can help these students with their transition by offering this constant support system. This support system is exactly what they need. I needed that support system this past summer. I did not have the best of summers. Actually, I had a really hard summer and it was a very tough adjustment period, but I am glad to be back here with people who unconditionally care about me. It truly means a lot to be in this pulpit right now. I want more people to feel how I feel right now: Loved and important. Not important in the sense that you are in a position of power, but important in how you make a difference in someone else's life... and they appreciate you for the person that you are, and the person that you are going to be.

This church needs to be that constant in someone's life. That place where, no matter what you do, people welcome you with open arms. I didn't come back to this church for months until October, and it felt like I hadn't been here in only a few days. That is what makes church special. It's what makes Saint James the Less special. It's the reason why this congregation must grow and continue to grow for many years to come.