

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Good morning. Thank you for asking me to come back and celebrate the Good News with all of you. I can think of no better way to ring in the new year. To say I missed all of you would be an extreme understatement.

And so, here we are on New Year's Eve, looking at what is ahead for all of us in the coming year. This day in particular, is about second chances. No matter what has been our experience for the 364 days that proceed December 31<sup>st</sup>, on this day we can make plans for a whole new adventure starting on January 1<sup>st</sup> – the new year. There is almost something magical about the movement of the clock's hand from 11:59 to 12:00 p.m. In that moment, we are transformed from what was, to what can be.

I have had so many second chances in my life. And even third chances. My wife and I were engaged three times before we were eventually married. Three times. And each time, you

have to increase the size of the engagement ring. I had to get married – I was going broke. But now we have been married almost 29 years, and we have two wonderful children who are the pride and the joy of our lives. But for second chances, I would not be the lucky man I am today. I definitely married up.

And when I was told 17 years ago that I had hepatitis C, and there wasn't really anything they could do at the time to cure it, but one doctor took me in as a patient and said, "Let's try this." And it worked. I was given a second chance. I don't know why. I certainly didn't deserve it.

Think about all the second chances in the Bible. Mary Magdalen. The tax collector. The centurion. Lazarus. Peter's repeated chances. And Saul, who became Paul, because of a second chance.

But that's the thing about getting a second, or a third chance. When they are presented, you can spend your time

asking why; you can question whether this time will be any different than the last; you can simply turn your back and walk away; or you can embrace it.

Everyone has heard the phrase, “There but for the Grace of God go I.” What does that mean? In today’s Gospel, we are told, “From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” By the simplest definition grace is “unmerited favor” or “unconditional love.” I suppose we could say that God so loved us that he has decided to give us a second chance, even if we don’t deserve it. So what do we do with it? What do we do with a second chance? What do we do with God’s grace, so freely given?

For me, I am going to grab hold of the second chance I’ve been given here at St. Martins. I am fortunate that in the last six months my family and I have grown closer than ever. I feel

comfortable that I am able to return to active ministry, part-time, and I am so grateful that you have opened the doors of St. Martin's to me again.

And what about you? It's the end of 2017 and the beginning of 2018. What's in the future for St. Martin's? Are you looking at a second chance? Are you experiencing the grace of God? I think so. Then what are you going to do with it? You can spend your time asking why; you can question whether this time will be any different than the last; you can simply turn your back and walk away; or you can *embrace* it.

May I be so bold as to suggest that you and we *embrace* it. At 12:00 midnight tonight, it becomes 2018. There are 365 blank pages on the calendar. Every one of them an opportunity. Every one of them an offering of God's grace to each of us. Let's embrace it. Make it a new year's resolution. "In 2018, I resolve to make the most of St. Martin's."

Sure, you can still resolve to lose weight – I’m in on that – for the 19<sup>th</sup> year in a row. We can resolve to spend more time at the office, or away from the office. Or to finish the projects we’ve been putting off. Or to read more and watch television less. We can have multiple resolutions, but let’s make this one together. “God has given us the “unmerited favor” and “unconditional love” of St. Martin’s Episcopal Church and one another, and we will embrace it.”

St. Martin’s is your church. That’s both a blessing and a responsibility. The future of this congregation is sitting right here. Don’t let anyone from the outside tell you that you have to do this or you have to do that. This is your church, not theirs. But you have to embrace it. If not you, then who? If not now, then when?

Like many of you, I have been through the process of finding a new Rector. The last church I was at took 24 months.

That's crazy. Billion dollar corporations hire presidents and CEO's in months, not years. Coaches and managers of professional sports teams are hired in weeks. Sometimes they are hired, fired, and then rehired in less time. Don't let anyone tell you that a priest is different. We priests like to think we are incredibly important and hard to replace, but we're not.

But the real work during this time is in your hands. The early Christians gathered in small rooms. They grew the Church from the ground up, relying upon one another for help and hope, always with the faith that God's grace would help them survive. Be a part of that here at St. Martin's. Even if it is one extra hour a month, embrace it. If it is being part of the vestry, embrace it. If it's participating on a committee or the alter guild or the prayer group, embrace it. Stay five minutes longer after the services and say hello. Just five minutes. Embrace it.

And you will succeed. How do I know? Because I know you. But I also know God. And God will not fail us. God does not fail us.

Let me finish with part of today's Psalm:

Hallelujah!

How good it is to sing praises to our God! \*  
how pleasant it is to honor him with praise!

The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; \*  
he gathers the exiles of Israel.

He heals the brokenhearted \*  
and binds up their wounds.

He counts the number of the stars \*  
and calls them all by their names.

Great is our Lord and mighty in power; \*  
there is no limit to his wisdom.

Amen.