



St. Mark's Episcopal Church

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Greetings and salutations, families of St. Mark's,

This past year has truly been one of challenges for all of us. With the COVID pandemic, the loss of precious family members and friends, and the realization of a "new normal", we are different than we were 18 months ago, but I believe we are stronger for it.

We have many blessings to be thankful for. I don't need to tell you that, you have witnessed plenty of them. We were able to realign how we worship through Zoom and continued with Zoom even after we were able to meet in person, we started the Botetourt Music Academy, Homework Helps has gotten back under way, we have an amazing new mural and of course the updates to our campus thanks to 3rd Peter and his amazing work ethic, as well as plans for the future memorial garden to name a few.

We believe that God is going to do something great in all your lives today and every day, and that we will be blessed. Let's think about 2 Corinthians 9:6. "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." Paul is speaking here of the law of sowing and reaping. If you want to reap a harvest, you must sow a seed. Now let's look at what Jesus has to say in Matthew 6:26. "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" Jesus said that God feeds the birds of the air, and they don't even sow and reap! How much more valuable are you, who sow and reap, than they are to God? So, Jesus says, don't worry! God sees your gift, he sees your faithful tithing, and He will not hold back His blessing to those who give in faith.

The above spoke to me so strongly. I'll explain. I wasn't raised in the church. If I went to church as a child, it was because I woke up early and caught the **Joy Bus** that came around my neighborhood and took me to church. I don't even remember the name of the church now. I grew up the youngest of four children. I never laid eyes on my biological father; my mom took all of us and left him when she was pregnant with me. He was an alcoholic and abusive. My mom and my grandmother, Nan, raised the four of us and there were times that were really uncomfortable for us. This man, who helped create the four of us, never paid child support. Both my mom and Nan worked full-time and did their best for us. We always had clothes on our backs and enough food to eat, even if it wasn't what we really wanted to eat. I remember as a little kid watching my mom and Nan try to figure out how to pay the bills and still have enough for food. The crying, the worry, the stress was felt by all of us.

Then, I remember my Nan saying, "You know, God never put anything on the face of this earth that He didn't help provide for. Not even the smallest bird." This is still a quote that I share with others who are struggling. It made that much of an impact on me. Boy, it is SO TRUE!!! My grandmother also taught me to share that last piece of bread with someone who needs it. There will always be plenty to go around.

I share this because of the strong faith my grandmother had and the importance of giving. We as a congregation are led by grace, to give. With our hearts, our minds, and our generosity to others.

As we look to close out 2021 and prepare for 2022, let us all give thought and attention to what our church means to us and to our community. I do believe we will see growth within our church, and we will continue to minister by grace with love and purpose. We look forward to continuing our ministries and the building up of the body of Christ.

In closing, I am thankful for your time, your guidance, and your prayerful consideration to pledge to St. Mark's. As scripture says, "O Heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in."

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

- Matthew 6:26

Confession: "Lord today I bring my gift to your house. You say in your word that when I sow, I will reap a harvest, and I thank you in faith for it. I believe and receive my blessing, and I stand on your word."

With love and prayers for this next year,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Danielle Alexander', with a stylized, flowing script.

Danielle Alexander
Senior Warden