

Not only is it a real privilege to be the preacher here at St. Mark's tonight, but it is also a deep down genuine pleasure. And that is because I love Willis Logan and the whole Logan family. And in this part of the great state of Virginia, there are a lot of them to love! And not just Ashley and Nev, George and Fred, but also George and Harmon and the endless supply of aunts and uncles and 1st, 2^{cd}, and 3rd cousins.

As I said, I love Willis. And believe me, I speak not just myself but for everyone at Christ Church, Charlottesville. We rejoiced at Willis' coming and we mourned at his going. But even while we mourned, we never doubted the rightness of his call to this wonderful and historic parish. It's true - the suspicious fact that Buck Heartwell was Senior Warden here during the search, while his brother, Proal Heartwell was Senior Warden at Christ Church at that same time might make one wonder about insider trading.

But to see the way that the Logans as well as St. Mark's have flourished in the year Willis has been here is to know the truth of what Jesus says in tonight's gospel. *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide."* God has clearly chosen Willis for this time and this place, and we are here to attest tonight the excellent choice God has made.

In this short sermon I hope to elucidate God's excellent choice. And the sermon will be short because there is other business at hand in an institution, like the powerful prayer that Willis will say committing himself to this charge. Plus, I hear there is good barbecue to be eaten in the parish hall right after the service.

Willis possesses an unusual mix of traits and abilities which combine to make him a first rate rector. The fact that he is a successful businessman is important. Churches have staffs and budgets and day to day operations and mission statements and long range vision plans just like any other business. The rector must be firmly planted right in the middle of this worldly work, working along side his wardens and vestry. Willis has the grit and the chutzpah to make right decisions even when those decisions may be unpopular or personally disadvantageous.

It's true that Willis knows how to "git er done", but what makes him such an effective minister is that he also has a tender heart. He truly loves people - all kinds of people. We've just prayed that God would sustain Willis with patience and understanding that he may love and care for God's people. That is a prayer that has already been answered. By the grace of God, Willis does indeed love others in the way that Jesus speaks about in tonight's gospel: *"this is my commandment, love one another as I have loved you."* He even loves his dogs, Herbie and Jerry, whose occasional misbehavior might make them difficult to love for someone who lacks Willis' tender heart.

So the admixture of business acumen and a bleeding heart make for an excellent choice as rector of St. Mark's, Fincastle. But what really matters is something more profound, more enduring, more powerful than the strengths or weaknesses of any given minister. What really matters is the real reason that we are here tonight. Although I've just done it, we are not here to celebrate the person of Willis Logan. And thankfully, Willis would be the first person to recognize that with gratitude.

We're here tonight to recognize and honor the only True and Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. He tells us, "*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*" And that is just what Jesus Christ has done for us and is the real reason that we are here. In the words of Thomas Cranmer, one of Willis' great heroes, Jesus did "*suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there, by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.*"

Without Christ's death on the cross squarely at the center of all we do, think and say, then no amount of ministerial skill or charisma will amount to hill of beans. Fortunately, the new rector of St. Mark's, Fincastle believes the gospel with the entirety of his warm heart and shrewd mind. Why else would one give up a successful business career to go into the ministry?

I'll close with a vignette from Cranmer's life, which somehow reminds me of your rector. The tempestuous Henry VIII had a complicated, but dedicated relationship with his first protestant Archbishop of Canterbury. Cranmer, a mild mannered, but fiercely principled scholar, was the only person who could disagree with the King and keep his head on his shoulders - literally. He loved Henry, despite Henry. While Cranmer engineered the English protestant reformation, Henry remained dedicated to theology, if not the governance of the Roman church. That is, until the very end of his life as he lay dying in his chamber.

Here's the scene described by Leslie Williams, in her book "A Short Life of Thomas Cranmer," a book that Willis just recommended to me. "*Henry's royal chaplain entered the dark death chamber; candles were flickering casting shadows on the walls. Henry lay still on his bed; a quiet bulk. He could no longer talk, but he took hold of Cranmer's hand and would not let go. Then the archbishop, calling on the king to put his trust in Christ, and to call upon his mercy, asked him to give a sign with his eyes or with his hand, that he trusted the Lord. The king wrung the archbishop's hand as hard as he could.*"

To put our trust in Christ and call on his mercy - at our death bed, in the course of our days, or even at the institution of a rector. Really, what more needs to be said?

Amen.

