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I am accustomed, when confronted with a creative challenge, to *do* things, to get stuff done, to get right to work. And in parish ministry, there are layers of creative challenges, inviting me to create ever-lengthening task lists. It is hard to count all the things many of us had to *do* to prepare for this meeting. And the meeting itself focuses on the myriad things many more of us had to *do* this past year, and chose to do, and wanted to do, and planned to do, and rather disliked doing but did anyway. You can page through our printed annual report and learn about many of the *doings* of this past year. It was a bright, busy year of doings.

In a few moments I will thank some of our members, and it would be easy to focus only on our shared gratitude for their accomplishments. But I don't think that really expresses my gratitude for them, and for you—for all of you. For every single one of you. When I reflect on *you*, the human beings who constitute the parish of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Seattle, I honestly don't begin or end with my appreciation for something you've done. Now, what you have done is impressive: we are growing in numbers, but also in energy and confidence, in spirit and delight, in depth and breadth. We are at the beginning of another invigorating year of grace, in God's sight. And all of this is due to our shared hard labor, our elbow grease, our good and steady work, our *doings*. And yes, yes, always I am grateful for all your work.

But it really is *you just existing* that fills my heart with gratitude. Like lots of rectors I can get caught up in the numbers: I think I've gotten quite good at counting twenty-five humans in a section of pews, without numbering them off, head by head. I can just see twenty-five, and multiply it by about 3.5, and that's our attendance at that particular mass. I'll come up to Gary—the person who does our official count most often—and find that I'm often within about five digits of the actual number. But it's not a high headcount I want: it's *you*. So I scan the congregation not just for a number, but for faces both familiar and unfamiliar. If I know your name, I likely know at least one other thing about you: we are still a small enough parish for the pastor to know just about everyone. (If I see Ethan, say, at the 5pm liturgy, I know without looking that his sons Anton and Damian are somewhere in the

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building.) And if I don't know your name, I can often tell right away whether I *should* know it: "Drat," I'll sometimes say to myself. "I've seen them before. I'm sure we met in the narthex the other week. Did they say their name was Christy? Carol?" I'll soon find out. And I feel so good to see Christy or Carol again. I am so glad they're here.

And so, now I will publicly thank an always-incomplete list of persons in particular. But as I do so, remember that I am grateful to them not merely for all that they do for St. Paul's, but for who they are. I am grateful that they are here with me, and with all of you. Remember, the first members of the Jesus Movement didn't feed hungry people. *They ate with them:* everyone is hungry. Boil down everything we do to what is essential, and you'll have a growing group of people who simply want to be together. Here are some (but not all) of the people I am privileged and honored to draw alongside in Christian community:

Our staff:

Brent Coats: bravely took up a new task

Gary James: our most distinguished musician in all of our 125 years

Emily Tweedie: our parish's right arm

Livestreamers: Seth Thomsen, Mike Lion

Nursery staff: Rebecca Harless, Amy Nyland, Juliana Stratton

Section leaders: Julia Baker, Teresa Clark, Matt Lockett, Kevin Wyatt-Stone

Our priest associates:

Mary Jane Francis: direct, driven, a prophetic leader

Catharine Reid: shepherd of many, provides exquisite care

Jay Rozendaal: the quintessential artist and priest

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Our vestry:

Daphne Monary-Ernsdorff: my partner and friend, sensitive yet reliable, tries to say Yes

Liz Tallent: sharp and observant, creative, depth of character

Mary Baranowski: elder and mystic, leader of prayer

Sharon Cumberland: we reserve peculiar honors for this poet

Howard Henry: an example of Benedictine stability, a Trinitarian enthusiast

Becky Hughes: game for a good time, explores the nature of Christian friendship

Andrew Kronenwetter: holy desire, divine longing, sings a song in the night

Pat Lynch: good humor, the faith of a companion on the Way

John Sutherland: savors the delight of the feast – the sparkle of crystal, the glad goodness of the embrace

Elaine Speer: before St. Paul's came to be, Elaine is: the solemnity of quiet dignity

Others on the Parish Ministry Council, and other key leaders:

Laura Griffin: the beating heart at the center, notices everything, cares for us

Mark Taylor: master of *visio divina*, fabulous shoes, scholar, psalmist

Lizann Jones: how does one embody holy community? Be like Lizann.

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BJ Ohlweiler: A proper Christian who reads the manual (the New Testament) and does what she's instructed to do

Daryl Schlick: a Righteous One, a mighty oak

Prue Kluckhohn: our anchor, our 'woodmaid,' our head of household

Laurel Tallent: how does one embody creative delight? Be like Laurel.

And finally, our Treasurer, General Contractor, and de facto Staff Member:

Barbara Potgieter: a tremendous mind, a witness to the faith, a doctor of the church whose every act of leadership teaches theology to the faithful

There is something I think only the dogs in my household may know, and I don't expect it's something that interests them too much, so even they don't really know it: nearly every time I take the dogs on a walk (and between the two of us, Andrew and I complete four dog walks per day, sometimes five), I think about you. I think about St. Paul's. This happens on most of my runs, too. I reflect on our ministries together, sure; I reflect on our many *doings*. But most often I simply just reflect. I think about how good it is to see you, how good it is simply to be together. I love life, and I love people. And if we learn anything from the Good News of Jesus Christ, I hope we learn that he was always wanting to be with people. "Come and have breakfast," he would say. "Come and see." He would bid them go off with him for quiet time. He would move through their locked doors and breathe the Spirit on them. *Compassion* means "to suffer with." *Companion* means "to break bread with." I long to see you. I delight to see you. And so I will close my "report" to you (this is not as much a report as it is a valentine) with a poem about time with dogs, about time with dogs that inevitably ends up being about *you*. The poem is called *The Clearing*, and it was written by Jane Kenyon.

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The Clearing¹

By Jane Kenyon

The dog and I push through the ring
of dripping junipers
to enter the open space high on the hill
where I let him off the leash.

He vaults, snuffling, between tufts of moss;
twigs snap beneath his weight; he rolls
and rubs his jowls on the aromatic earth;
his pink tongue lolls.

I look for sticks of proper heft
to throw for him, while he sits, prim
and earnest in his love, if it is love.

All night a soaking rain, and now the hill
exhales relief, and the fragrance
of warm earth. . . . The sedges
have grown an inch since yesterday,
and ferns unfurled, and even if they try
the lilacs by the barn can't
keep from opening today.

I longed for spring's thousand tender greens,
and the white-throated sparrow's call
that borders on rudeness. Do you know—
since you went away
all I can do
is wait for you to come back to me.

¹ Jane Kenyon, "The Clearing" from *Collected Poems* (Graywolf Press, 2005).