

OPENING:

“What do you think?” Jesus asks the audience in our Gospel
He has asked this a couple of previous times in Gospel of Matthew:
when he is talking to Peter about money
and then when he is talking to the disciple about the sheep.

“What do you think?”

What if the question isn't rhetorical, what if he is actually asking the question.

“What do you think..... Peter?”

“What do you think..... disciples?”

“What do you think..... scribes and elders?”

And then

“What do you think..... people of St. Timothy's?”

Dr. Phil, the famous television show host and psychologist, was once asked:
“If you could interview anyone in the world, past or present, who would it be (and what would you ask)?”

And Dr. Phil answered “Jesus Christ... (AND) I would really like to have a conversation with him about the *meaning of life*. (AND) I would ask Jesus th(is) question: ‘What do I need to do from this day forward?’”¹

Now, your mind should have already started churning: someone DID ask that sort of question of Jesus (thank you very much Dr. Phil!) and it did not go very well.²

The Rich young ruler, two chapters prior to this in Matthew, asked Jesus that question: “What do I do, what is the meaning of life? give it to me straight, no more dancing around, no more answering questions with a question.”

Jesus says: “Keep the Commandments”

The Rich man says: “Great, got those covered, what else?”

And Jesus says: “sell all of your possessions to the poor, and follow me.”

And the rich man ran off angry.

¹ Nicole Sawyer, “Dr. Phil: 8 Things You Didn't Know About TV Host Phil McGraw” *ABC News* (May 28, 2015).

<https://abcnews.go.com/Lifestyle/dr-phil-things-tv-host-phil-mcgraw/story?id=31369105>

² Matthew 19.16-30 (and parallels).

STEWARDSHIP:

WELCOME to our STEWARDSHIP CAMPAGIN KICKOFF 2024 here at St. Timothy's Episcopal Church.

Dr. Phil is no help, but fortunately we can keep going back to that question, and the person of Jesus, the face of this gentle rabbi-teacher , the reality of Jesus, who is asking us:

“What do you think? What do you think?”

In response, your vestry and myself and the Stewardship Team, and our cracker-jack marketing and communications department, knowing that we already used “St. Timothy's is Back” last year, we came up with “Deepening our Roots.”

You should have gotten a letter from the church this week explaining that with a pledge card and the whole bit. The basic gist is “We are indeed back. And we are going to be here for another 150 years. But in order to do that, we need to continue this process of growing and watering and nurturing the work of the Spirit here at St. Timothy's by giving of our time, talent and treasure.

We need to deepen our commitments, we need to deepen our roots.

“What do you think, St. Timothy's?": I already know the answer to that question in part, because you have already submitted your reply to it, at least about a school in Haiti, in that war-torn and poverty stricken country, that we have been supporting for a decade plus.

You answered Jesus' question with this remarkable support and generosity and an incredibly successful Haiti Agape. You looked in those eyes and made it happen. I don't mind saying that I was not sure that it was going to and then you told me what you thought. But I learned that our roots are deep in that relationship.

“What do you think St. Timothy's?”

About this property.

About these 8 acres and however many square feet of mostly functional building inside.

We have about dozen AA and support groups that meet here almost every day of the week. Our Preschool are on the Playground every day and use this space for its graduation. The Boy Scouts built this fire pit and they painted the Loft upstairs.

This afternoon we will host a Block Party and blessing of the animals.

“What do you think?” People will ask as they drive by and see a Live Band, and a moon bounce and tons of animals.

Here it comes, I have been practicing all morning: *en Espanol*

(“What do you think?”) *A ti qué te parece?*

Our Saturday evening members took the lead on our Community Garden, helpfully named “Rooted in Herndon,” which serves as a visible symbol of our rootedness to this physical plot of land, to God’s acreage, to this place.

When I first started here and I would get jumpy, I would sit out on these picnic tables and I ask Andy Hamm “What do you think?” about this church and it’s future and he would calm me down somehow and I would look out and think: “one day there would be no construction on Van Buren and we would have a sign rooted in the ground, proclaiming who we are.”

I have heard this story... not sure if it’s true: but when the times got tough and we talked about merging with another church, our Spanish-speaking brothers and sisters said: “Well we live here, we are not going to another church.” Our roots are *here* in this town.

Similarly, when I interviewed, the young ladies who showed the church to me, they mentioned themselves as “Herndon gals” as they had grown up or lived here in the town limits. Not all of us are so lucky to live in the 20170, but our roots go out to Reston, to this magical place called Oak Hill, and to Ashburn, and to Sterling, and to Fairfax and to places farther. Like Haiti and Pine Ridge, and England and Japan and all across the world.

BUT we are rooted here at 432 Van Buren, for better or worse, and to the tune of a mortgage about \$700k.

“What do you think?” Jesus asks us. Are we committed to this church in this moment where Churches are facing decline?

This month, we will hear in our Stewardship Moments from parishioners how *they* would answer that question, how they have committed to giving to St. Timothy’s and how they believe this process of Deepening our Roots is ongoing and important and Spirit-filled in their lives.

We will hear from an old-timers, Pat and Deke Smith (they don’t seem old to me!) We will hear from new-comers, Varun Lal (whose child was baptized here in June and whose other child graduated from our preschool)

And we will also hear from Tim Allen and Rob Huizar, who have come back, who have returned to St. Timothy’s from their posting in Germany.

(I will let you figure out among those who is the 1st and 2nd son from our Parable) I thank them for agreeing to speak, it’s always my favorite part of the Stewardship season, and I like to feel like I give them free reign. But they are nice so they ask: “Charles, what do you want us to say?”

And I turn the question around to them: “What do you think?”
So no pressure.

PERSONAL

If you are going to ask that question of others, you have to ask it of yourself of course. “Charles, what do you think?”

I would first say something like your pledge allows us to plan our budget for next year, your fulfilment of this year’s pledge allows us to finish this one strong, and that without each we could not pay our bills.

“What do you really think?”... I can hear my son saying, and maybe Jesus too on a beautiful morning like this one.

Then I would say that I think I need help as your priest, which you might think is rich coming from someone who has been all of 10 hours as your newly named Rector. But I think that issue of staffing and how we support our Spanish-speaking members, how we provide for Christian formation, are the ones that are our greatest priority.

Your vestry and I have been working hard on this, coming up with a Job Description for an Associate Rector, be it Part-Time or Full-Time, and interviewing folks and getting the word out.

We don’t know what the future holds with that. That’s the thing about roots they go underground, we don’t know quite where they are or where they are headed. We see the fruits of that system, and we see it all around us.

“What do you think?”

We don’t know. Faith, pledges, trust, stewardship. It’s not the meaning of life. Jesus refuses to give that answer, but he does say “Follow me.”

AMEN