This is my first time speaking from the pulpit, though the people I work with and my kids would tell you I preach all the time. I’m up here today to share what I hope will be a motivational and inspirational sermon about our church, our future, our mission, and why your support is important. In line with my personality, it’s probably going to be a little blunt, a bit scattered, but also genuine and from the heart with nothing but good intentions.

Our stewardship campaign is upon us. You know Lou often talks about prayer in times like this. She’ll say, “It’s OK just to pray y’all”. She’s thankfully not a televangelist or one of these preachers that overtly asks for your time and money in exchange for membership or redemption. She wouldn’t be comfortable with it, and frankly that’s not what any of us are looking for in a pastor.

I on the other hand am not constrained by clerical duty, tradition, or political correctness. I am a lame duck senior warden with nothing to lose. When I was a kid and I did something wrong and I said I was sorry, my dad used to say, “sorry don’t feed the bulldog my friend!”. That meant there was going to be some penance. And in that vein I would like to proclaim that prayer don’t find the lost and heal the broken, or pay the power bill. At least not prayer alone.

Sue and I were greeters last week and I saw John Croteau walking, what I would call for John, briskly, from his car. It was good to see John moving a lot quicker than he was a few months ago after his back troubles. He commented that he’s been doing a lot of exercises and it’s helped. I know everyone here prayed for John the past year, and I thought, if we had just prayed for John, he wouldn’t be feeling as well, he needed to do that physical therapy. As he put it to me, “Gods been kicking me in the butt to get moving.” He needed prayer, our thoughts to lift him up and perhaps nudges from the holy spirit. But John had to do the work, he needed to do the practical things that ease his pain and allow him to lead a normal life.

Our church is the same way, we pray together. We pray for each other, for loved ones, for people we don’t know, for victims, for our government, oh lord do we need to pray for our government. We pray for guidance and strength and we pray that our ministries will have an impact. But that prayer is only part of the equation. What keeps our mission alive and this church running week after week, is the support we give with our actions, with our time and with our talents. From something as simple as reading first lesson, to taking part in one of the many ministries our folks are involved in, to writing a check. From a practical standpoint, the church needs our time and talents to lead a normal life and grow.

Think globally, act locally. We’ve heard that saying before, probably seen it on a bumper sticker or two. This congregation acts in so many selfless ways. You are an inspiration to me every day. The Moore’s and their work with Metropolitan Ministries, the Halls’ and the Landstreet’s and their work with Family Promise, Greg and Curtis and the Salvation Army, well Greg Love and pretty much everything. The work around the church, Lenora as clerk of the vestry for years, Joan and the all hands on deck atmosphere of St. Francis Day, Sheila as our treasurer, the Diamantis’ and their work on pilgrims way, a most special place in the hearts of many people here. Mike Bowland offering all his expertise in our master plan projects. Chuck and Suzie and 5 pm service music. Carol, Maureen, the Cantelou’s, I could go on and on for the rest of the service with names and acts of support for this church and our community. Inside and outside the acts of people here truly live up to the think globally act locally principle. It’s quiet, it’s not flashy, it’s not selfish, it’s simply preaching the gospel and only using words when necessary as our namesake Francis would have wanted. It’s been a lesson all of you have shown my children, and for that Sue and I are most grateful.
And I’d like to take a turn here and talk about faith. I’ll be quite honest with everyone, and admit that I struggle with my faith. I feel like I’m on a journey, still trying to figure out what the world is about and trying to figure out my place in it. I came across an interview with Elaine Pagels, a professor of Religion at Princeton University. The interviewer asked her, “is faith necessary to receive the wisdom of religion?” Her response, quote, “I don’t think so at all. Faith is a particularly Christian preoccupation. Protestants talk about it more than Catholics do. If you talk to a Buddhist or to many Jews, it’s about practice; it’s about what you do. If you take something like the Torah, “you shall not kill, you shall honor your parents.” There are very specific ways of acting, and that’s what really matters. It’s about justice and mercy.” When I read this I immediately made the connection to St. Francis, where our people do more than just talk the talk.

When I left home after college I stopped going to church, and my parents would constantly nag me, “go to church, any church, just go.” And I’d think, so what’s the use of that if I’m not sure why I’m going, seemed like such a silly thing to demand of me. Like I’m going to benefit from some kind of religious osmosis. Shouldn’t I believe in something, or want to believe in something before I start dedicating time to it. For me, my faith is a process, not a weekly event. I’m still on my journey...but I am much farther along in my journey because of this church and all of you. This church, all of you, represent what’s best about religion and faith. The belief, the faith, combined with the practice. I’m still trying to figure it all out, but I choose to figure it out here at St. Francis.

Because it’s a comfortable place to figure it out. We’ve got all kinds of people, just like a family. We have our mom and dads, kids, mee maw, brothers and sisters, some weird cousins and more than a few crazy aunts and uncles. And by the way, if you’re wondering who the crazy uncle is, it’s you. But we still love you.

Our stewardship campaign is under way, I hope you will take Lou’s advice and pray. Pray about what your life will allow you to give to the church this coming year. In time, talents, resources. And I hope you’ll also thoughtfully consider the value of this church community and how your investment in it will make our world a better place.

Today’s psalm is psalm 126, verse 4 should be all the motivation we need to make 2019 an historic year for our church. “The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad indeed. “

It’s time to pray Y’all!!!!