



St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

Annual Meeting Sunday

June 6, 2026; Proper 5A: [Genesis 12:1-9](#), [Romans 4:13-25](#), [Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26](#)

There has been much talk these days about Judaism, Islam, and Christianity as Abrahamic religions. Each religion claims Abraham as their spiritual father and forbearer. Each religion worships Abraham's God. In case you are wondering, I am not talking about Abraham Lincoln! This Abraham was from Ur, one of the largest cities in the ancient empire of Mesopotamia. He lived somewhere around two thousand years before Christ. He was first known as Abram and became Abraham after making a covenant with God. His journey began when he followed God's call and left his country and his comfort zone to go to the Promised Land. When he went, he not only brought along his family, his flocks and herds. He also brought along his God. Abraham was Abraham because he moved forward in faith.

Today, on this day of the Annual Meeting, St. Luke's is doing the same thing. Over the past year we have moved forward in faith in worship, in spiritual formation, in fellowship, and in outreach to the wider community. In 2025, more than 8000 people attended worship in person and more than 9000 attended on line. Thanks by the way to Bobby who besides providing beautiful music each week also runs our livestream from the organ bench! We had 11 baptisms, 6 marriages, and 8 burials. We had a burial and a wedding yesterday, another wedding and baptism in two weeks, and have more of each scheduled in the months to come. As a priest friend used to say, "hatch, match, dispatch." Worship didn't just happen on Sundays and didn't happen just at St. Luke's. Prayers were made and God was praised at St Peter's, Shabbat on the Beach, the Cathedral in Garden city, the Jewish Center, the Islamic Center, Calvary Baptist Church, Christ Church Sag Harbor, the lighting of the Village Christmas tree, the lighting of the Hospice Christmas tree, the blessing of a fleet and blessing of a triathlon in Montauk, a burial at sea off of the Montauk lighthouse, and at Sunset on the bow a Coast Guard Cutter on a drug intervention mission at an undisclosed location in the Caribbean sea. Some of the most meaningful moments in worship were in quieter, less dramatic places: in the new women's

prayer group, in the sharing of communion in people's homes and in the hospital, and in the chapel, as well as other moments when just two or three were gathered together. St. Luke's moved forward in faith in Worship. St. Luke's also moved forward in faith in Spiritual Formation (what we used to call Christian Education), in Fellowship, and in Outreach. Formation is one of the highlights of my Sunday mornings. I love singing with Sunday School kids before the 10am service and working with Colleen Stonemetz and our Sunday School team. I enjoy the 9am Adult Forum just as much. If you haven't been there – and if you haven't been to one of Sal Tocci's classes, the Peconic Deanery Lenten Series, or the Jewish-Christian conversations with Rabbi Josh Franklin and me – you have missed something special indeed. These programs have helped people grow spiritually and intellectually. They have also built community, begun friendships and established trust, which is what happens when you are in a safe enough place to wrestle with questions, open your heart and share your soul. The same kinds of connections happen through fellowship. From the Advent Dinner to a Seder; from Halloween to Christmas Pageants, Easter Egg hunts, field trips and a high tea; from diocesan conventions to elections, and celebrations; and from this weekend's kick off party and Pride Parade to the longest running and most amazing Summer Fair East Hampton has ever seen, St. Luke's fellowship has been non-stop. Like worship, some of the most moving moments of fellowship happen in quieter ways, when parishioners check in on one another, keep in touch, and offer support and a listening ear. Almost every time I visit people in their home, I hear stories of how other parishioners have already reached out to them. That is a sign of a community that cares! Of course, when we use the word community, we tend to think of the wider community. When I came here, I shared a vision of St Luke's being the center of the community – in the heart of the Hamptons with the Hamptons in its heart - a place where people know they can come in times of celebration and times of need. This is another area where St. Luke's has shined. Through projects like the Angel Tree, distributing sandwiches at the train station, and helping with a whole variety of wonderful groups and agencies, the work of the outreach committee and of individual parishioners has been absolutely amazing. This year the Centro San Francisco, the Spanish-speaking congregation in Riverhead (which shares its facility with Rural and Migrant Ministries) was going through. St Luke's stepped up with things like school supplies and Angel Tree gifts. Local clergy lobbied the diocese for support and stepped in themselves. The rector's discretionary fund helped buy new appliances for their church's kitchen. The fellowship committee equipped them with plates and silverware that were sitting in our basement. Just this week, a friend from here delivered a household worth of furniture to Father Luis, their priest. With help from Rural and Migrant Ministries, St. Luke's was the starting point for a fall caravan to support farm workers, which crossed the entire state, beginning right here. You didn't need to go across the state to find activity. Over the past year

own Hoie Hall hosted the Hamptons Festival of Music, Hamptons Whodunnit, Farmer's Market, PianoFest, OLA, Vany, Bonac Lights, Box Art, Community Listening Sessions and the debut of a local play by the Accobanac Theater Project – as well as a host of others. People are our greatest asset but our physical plant is amazing as well. We don't just let groups use our space to raise money or support non-profits. We do this to welcome people to St Luke's and welcome them to a relationship with God. All this is managed by outstanding staff and volunteers. We just completed our audit and received a good report, which not only commended St. Luke's on our management, internal controls, and policies and procedures, but also reminded us that 75 cents of every dollar spent goes to mission. That, my friends, is an amazing thing.

This success was not without a few frustrations. We hoped for a curate – and got wonderful and generous support and had what looked like a good candidate. Unfortunately that person wasn't a match. We are still struggling to find the right person and still working on a place for that person to live. We set high goals for stewardship – and got wonderful and generous support – yet our campaign took almost nine months and struggled to the last minute. We hope for more young families with kids – and have a great Sunday school team – yet our numbers of kids and youth remain relatively small. None of these are insurmountable. They simply mean that we have more work to do. The real work is spiritual. It has to do with prayer, with digging into the gospel, and living it out.

As is clear in this morning's gospel, sometimes moving forward in faith can be a challenge. Sometimes moving forward in faith means moving beyond our comfort zones and the comfort zones of those around us. This year's Community Partner Award goes to Ruta 27. Ruta 27 offers English as a New Language lessons to Spanish-speaking adults. It began at St. Luke's, eventually outgrowing our space and moving to the High School where more than 250 people attended classes every week. Fearful of raids by ICE, Ruta 27 felt it was not safe to have so many Latino immigrants in one place. They reached out to St Luke's for help. We used our connections to reach out to the faith communities. As a result, the students are now dispersed in classrooms at Most Holy Trinity, the Jewish Center, other faith communities and – of course – St Luke's. Like the presence of St Luke's members at pro-democracy rallies and sermons and other writings that hold up Biblical and Baptismal values, hosting Ruta 27 classes may make some feel uncomfortable. I get this. However, if we are to live our mission, if we are to do what Jesus would do and be about what Jesus was about, we have no choice. As Abraham shows, sometimes God calls us to move beyond our comfort zones. Our world needs people who hold up decency, dignity, and respect; people who are guided by a moral compass and practice things

like compassion and kindness and reconciliation rather than retribution; people who hope against hope that God is with us and believe that good can and will prevail. We are at a point where being quiet is being complicit and where not contributing a Christian voice to the public square concedes that place to those who seem to have lost all connection with who Jesus was. As is clear in this morning's gospel, Jesus confronted hypocrisy, cared for tax collectors and sinners, and healed women, children, and others who were sick. He welcomed those whom others had pushed aside. Jesus knew that some people did not appreciate what he was doing. He knew they were laughing at him behind his back. He kept going anyway. As a result those who were sick were healed, those thought dead were brought back to life, and a report about him spread throughout the district. The same things, my friends, will happen right here, if like Abraham – and like Jesus - we keep moving forward in faith.

As we come to our annual meeting, I want to give a special thank you to those who have helped make all this happen. Thank you to our wardens Brian Craig and David Mellgard, our treasurer John Hadden, our vestry members, committee chairs, volunteers and all the members of St. Luke's. Thank you to our amazing staff: Tara Brinka, Colleen Stonemetz, Bobby Peterson, Oscar Giles, Erroll Bridgewater, Roslen Tavera, and this year's wonderful addition, Dan Mason. Thank you to my wife Shari for your support and care and patience and prayer. I couldn't do what I do without you. Thanks be to God and to all of you for this wonderful place and for our life and ministry together. It's perhaps not a mistake that part of East Hampton Town is called the Promised Land. We have been and continue to be blessed. On this day of the Annual Meeting, the state of this church is good. We are moving forward in faith. With God's help, last year was great. With God's help, this next year will be even better.