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About Vintage Voice

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VINTAGE VOICE

“What’s retiring like?”

By the Rev. Donald Allston Fishburne

When I began entering into what I call “first retirement” this year, friends and colleagues asked, “What’s retiring like?” Not “what’s *retirement* like” but “*retiring*.”

I was ordained at age 27. My process of retiring from full-time work after 35 years as a parish priest included some deliberate transition time.

My wife, Sarah, and I took a few weeks to disconnect from the parish that had been a part of our lives for the last seven years. Then two months more in earned sabbatical time; one month giving away things we really don’t need — and cherishing people and things we love and want to keep close to us. Then three weeks on a Danube River cruise, worshipping on Maundy Thursday in Prague with an Episcopal Church congregation, in an old synagogue on Good Friday, and on Easter Day in a Lutheran church in Nuremburg. That river cruise together was more of a learning and loving experience than I could have imagined.

Then it was back home — to move quickly from a city we love to a new place. As we settled into a new, active life of ministry and new expressions of vocation, friends in a clergy group — and then colleagues at a board meeting of a consortium of parishes — asked the same question: “What’s retiring like?”

After my rambling first attempts at answers, a word came to me: *lighthearted*.

“I feel lighthearted,” I said. Friends nodded and said they could see the change in my countenance.

I saw that transformed countenance, that easier step and more measured pace, in a friend and clergy colleague who retired the same day as I.

Lighthearted does not mean for me, necessarily, being carefree or giddy or silly every day — though there are those moments.

My understanding of Hebrew Scripture sees matters of the heart as being matters of the will and understanding — as well as matters of affection, love, and courage. If my understanding of the Latin (*cor*), Old French, and Middle English roots of the word are on target, courage is a matter of the heart — and courage is at the core of our ability to will, to love, to persevere, and to share joy.

For me, to be lighthearted in retiring is to carry love and life a bit more easily. To feel less the weight of the world (much of it self-imposed) as the rector of a parish or dean of a cathedral — or long-suffering assistant or associate or canon or deacon.

To be lighthearted is to take our Lord Jesus more seriously and to receive him even more joyfully — and, of course, to take myself less seriously.

This includes the lighthearted courage to lay down burdens, and to share matters of the heart more with Sarah.

When I asked Sarah a couple of years ago what she wanted for our anniversary, she said, “More time with you, Donald, that’s all I want.”

That is something I now can give and share.

So, this retiring process is one of laying some things down, letting some things go — and opening the heart.

“Take courage,” Jesus says. “It is I.”

I don’t think he meant that to be only for the moments in life in which we struggle against a huge crisis or challenge or decision. *Take courage, take heart, don’t be afraid* can be words our Lord speaks to us as he walks with us into new expressions of vocation — including active retirement — and into a new phase of life and aging.

This stage of retiring is also an experience of letting younger and brighter people of faith enter into the fullness of their vocations. A time to get out of the way, and also to be available as a mentor or coach — when asked.

“Take heart,” I say to them. “Jesus is walking alongside you.” And as our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry reminds us, “You’re part of the Jesus movement!”

Yes, we are. All of us. Including those of us who are “retiring.”



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