

Quickenings

A Report from the Dedication of St. Paul's Chapel, at Grace Point

by Mike Keene, Church of the Resurrection

In ages past, “quickenings” often referred to the moment a woman felt the child in her womb first move. For many, that moment was significant as the beginning of “life.” Modern science has of course challenged some of that thinking, as we know babies move around a lot and sense a lot before Mom ever feels movement at all. Still the notion of “quickenings”—as a way to single out, recognize, and name the moment of coming to life, where “life” is not a mere biological or chemical notion, but something full of high holiness—that notion is a valuable one in all kinds of ways.

Think of the first morning of spring, the day you head down to the mailbox to get the newspaper and realize all the birds are singing, the quality of the light has changed, and the air feels different and better—that moment feels like spring's *quickenings*.

Or if your church, as mine, ends the Easter Vigil with a sunrise service on Easter morning, think of the special moments during that service. We huddle in the cold and dark outside, light the first fire, use it to light the Paschal candle, and follow the candle into the dark church, chanting three times “The light of Christ....Thanks be to God” as we go. People find their ways into pews in the dark, the candle is set before us, and the cantor begins the ancient, ancient song called “The Exsultet”: “Rejoice now, heavenly hosts and choirs of angels...” And the church, in fact now tangibly The Church, comes to life again, shaking off the darkness of death and the tomb, coming out into the light, greeting Mary with something like “why do you look in an empty tomb?” That moment—entering the darkened church, finding a place in the pews, and the cantor starting to sing a song that's more than 1500 years old—is a particular moment of our faith's *quickenings*.

Just a few weeks ago, on May 2nd out at Grace Point Camp and Retreat Center on the shores of Watts Bar Lake, there was another kind of quickening, in the company of eagles and ospreys and 165 congregants from all over the Diocese of East Tennessee, on a day which at the last moment turned as sunny and bright as it could be. That day was especially poignant for all who have been involved with Grace Point—present and past Board members, summer camp people, volunteers, retreat participants, people who have been so gracious with their time and/or money to make the place what it is. WE, with the help of Bishop Charlie and a strong intervention by the Holy Spirit, consecrated the lovely new St. Paul's Chapel.

You remember that week (and the week before)—the skies had stayed gray or worse every day, there had been tornadoes and thunderstorms and hail and lightning seemingly every day, all over East Tennessee. Those of us who are Grace Point old timers envisioned a sea of mud and an embarrassingly small crowd of hardy souls. And at 10:15, in front of the scheduled 11:00 dedication, the handful of us on the Commons Building porch were laughing ruefully about having to spread ourselves out over the hundred and

ten chairs that had been set up in the chapel, to make it look a little better for the photographer.

But God was in the air that day, as Bonnie Raitt sings, and at 10:16 the clouds blew away, the sun came out sparkling bright, the ospreys and eagles and skimmers and swallows started their acrobatics over Chamberlain Cove, and cars and vans and trucks and a bus started driving up. So by 11:00 we had 110 chairs filled, and more people spilling out onto the porches of each transept, and more people standing up in the back of the worship space. The count at communion really was 165.

And the quickening? Well, the service for the bishop to dedicate a new church is supposed to start with the bishop and people on the outside—the bishop knocks on the door with the bishop’s crook, calls for the doors to be opened, and the bishop and people proceed into the building. But because of all the earlier rain, the plans had changed, and we were all inside—the building echoing with that little humming background noise that comes as people greet each other and find a place to sit or stand—and the bishop was the one who started outside. But at 11:00 we could hear, clearly, a *thump, thump, thump* from the back of the chapel, and the room grows quiet, and Bishop Charlie clearly says “Let the doors be opened.” He marks the threshold with the sign of the cross, and he says “Peace be to this house, and to all who enter here. In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*” The room is hushed, and it’s becoming apparent that something very special is starting to happen. As Bishop Charlie processes up the aisle, the Episcopal School Chorus, led by a guitar, quietly sings the familiar opening lines of a great call-and-response hymn: “This is the day,” and we respond, a little more robustly “This is the day.” The chorus calls more strongly “This is the day that the Lord has made,” and we answer more strongly still “that the Lord has made.” And by now everybody is joining in: “*This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*” And the song fills the room, and we go on singing to the end.

I was there, and I saw this happen with my own eyes. That building was just a building, and those people were just a random crowd of people, and as the bishop knocked on the doors and processed up the aisle and the music started quietly and then grew and grew to fill the church, there was a tangible quickening. In that place and at that time the Holy Spirit *moved*, filling with new life not just the building—now a church—but also all of us who were there.

St. Paul’s Chapel is designed to be a multi-use facility. Certainly it will serve as a focal point for worship at Grace Point, along with the Point itself, the living room of the Retreat House, and countless other spots both formal and informal on the 275 acres. St. Paul’s Chapel will also no doubt host EFM retreats, vestry retreats, summer camp talent shows, meetings and events of all kinds. As with a child who just came into the world, those of us who were there for this quickening have no way of knowing just what kinds of wonderful things the future holds for St. Paul’s Chapel. But if the shape of the future is in any important way at all determined by the quality of the start—by the quickening—St. Paul’s Chapel has a high and holy future indeed.