

I thank God for the grace given to me to follow Jesus. The call to be a social worker and call to be a pastor. I'm grateful for the grace to say yes and yes again to this calling.

I thank Claudia. She is the rock to my roll, the rhythm to my blues, the string to my kite, the home to my adventures. No one is more honest with me than Claudia, who teaches me to be say the right things and refrain from saying what I might otherwise. She didn't sign up to be a pastor's wife. When we married I was a hippie social worker and we had bought land in a commune called Grass Roots. Yet she has stood by me for the 42 years that we will celebrate in two days on December 10.

I thank my daughters Rachel and Rebecca who are the greatest gifts from God ever given to Claudia and me. As young women they are now teaching me many things, and I'm trying to listen and learn from them. I have a remarkable relationship with each of them and I'm grateful that they know Jesus Christ loves them infinitely more than I ever can. It's a father's dream.

Now I want to tell you a baseball story. You all know the Nationals were a great team when the 2019 season began. Yet, everything went wrong. A dismal cloud descended. Rumors swirled that the coach would be fired and the ace pitcher traded. Until something else happened. And that's what remarkable.

They began to take one game at a time. The leaders began to lead from their experience and insight into the game. When one team member failed, the others picked him up. No one judged another. They starting truly becoming an authentic team. Other members came to the team, who brought a joy and new insights and fresh energy. The began dancing together after every hit, every home run, every step forward. Just one game at a time. Soon, the team became known for their hilarious joy in the game and their care for each other. Songs emerged - Baby Shark. Players danced who had never danced. The shyest one among them even smiled and received the funny hugs of the others.

And Lo and behold, look what happened. This team did what no other team in Major League Baseball history has ever done!

In his commentary, the great baseball writer, Tom Boswell, described this as a "culture of winning" and said it is more important than any individual player. We all know that two great stars of 2019 are still not certain to return. What Boswell says is akin to what St. Paul's says: the culture of the body matters more than the individuals, including Steven Strasburg, Anthony Rendon and the Pastor of Saint Mark

The congregation that has a vital culture is what is most most important.

When I came to Saint Mark 18 years ago, I laughed myself to sleep with gratitude to God for calling me to this congregation. We experienced 9/11 together and the sniper attacks. We have traveled many roads together and I am enormously thankful for the Saint Mark team that has emerged, without judging each other, picking one another up and laughing even as we engaged matters that matters most to God and our neighbors. My colleagues - Shelby, Jeff, Christina, Susan, Ron, Jaime. And before them Beth, Peggy, Susan, LeAnn, Maggie, Scott, Kay and all my colleagues.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

It's been a great run. Alleluia. Thanks be to God.

Pastor Roy

