



They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. ~*Jeremiah 17:8*

Dear St. Stephen's Community:

The most important words to say in Church are "thank you." I try my best to say it as often as possible, and I always mean it. Today I say it to you. Thank you for the many gifts that you share with this wonderful community of St. Stephen's. Gratitude comes from both the heart and the soul, and day in and day out I am filled with such an abundance of gratitude for each and every person here at St. Stephen's. Your care, compassion, and dedication to this place and this community is ever present and deeply valued.

You have heard the familiar expression "can't see the forest for the trees" before. We most often use it to describe that occasion in which we lose sight of the big picture while focusing on the details. From my position, I often experience the blessing of being able to see the big picture of our congregation – the numerous ministries we provide, the impact we have on our community, and the ways that week after week we come together to celebrate our faith and praise God. This is the forest.

And I get to wander amongst the trees. From the small shoot reaching out from its seed and finding the sunlight, to the mightiest tree, standing tall, showing strength, and offering sheltering love to those who need it. You are those trees, each drawing strength from our common communion meal and showering the world with the love and grace you have come to know here. I am blessed that here in our congregation, I can see both the forest and the trees!

We are blessed in our little slice of heaven to be stewards of a tremendously abundant property full of great oaks. When I regularly walk along our nature trail, I am aware of the tangle of roots, how one tree is connected to another. Trees use these networks, secretly talking to each other through their roots, passing information along. Adult trees share with young saplings, a dying tree can send its remaining resources out to help the community. These networks, these roots of abundance, keep trees in place just as much as they free them to grow and share. This is a great image of our beloved community of St. Stephen's; where all generations are represented and valued. It speaks to the variety of ways in which St. Stephen's continues to be a life-giving source of grace, peace, and compassion to all.

The theme of our annual pledge campaign this year is **Rooted in Abundance**, and we are reminded that we are a mighty forest comprised of ancient trunks and sprightly saplings, each of us contributing our gifts to a world that needs us. As you hear the messages and stories of abundance this year, take note of how generosity spreads and widens our root structures of faith and action.

In the weeks to come you will be invited to name and pledge the gifts you will make in the following year to help our church and our neighbors. You will hear from different folks about the many ways in which St. Stephen's continues to be a place of abundant generosity. St. Stephen's Episcopal Church has had its deep roots in the Wimberley Valley for a very long time now. I am very thankful to see new growth alongside our well established mighty oaks. May we continue to give thanks, and to carry on the legacy of this place with vibrant energy and a renewed spirit.

In gratitude,

The Rev. Kevin LJ Schubert