

FROM THE DESK OF THE PASTOR.....

UNBOUND AND HOPEFUL

As we turn the page on another year and step into a new one, I know that many of us do so carrying a mixture of emotions. There is gratitude, certainly, but also weariness. The past few years have not been easy. Loss, uncertainty, division, and anxiety have become familiar parts of daily life, and even as a new year begins, it can be difficult to feel truly at ease. For some, the future feels less like an open door and more like a question mark.

As I mentioned in my homily a few weeks ago, I saw the film *Hamnet*, a story inspired by the early life of William Shakespeare, his wife Agnes, and the death of their young son during an outbreak of the plague. Based on a book published just before the first COVID lockdown in 2020, the movie faithfully follows this true story which is at times tough to watch. The final third is a deeply honest portrayal of grief, raw, helpless, and unsettling in its truth. One sees how loss can bind a person, narrowing their world and weighing heavily on the heart.

And yet, there is also a quiet transformation. As the story unfolds, Agnes's anger and despair do not simply disappear, but they slowly give way to something new. In her eyes, one can see grief loosening its grip, making room for hope, for calm, and for a fragile but real sense of peace. The pain remains, but it no longer has the final word. By the end, we are left hoping that both parents are stepping forward together, wounded yet still capable of life.

That movement, from being bound by grief to being able to walk forward again, calls to mind a powerful moment from the Gospel of John. When Jesus raises Lazarus from the tomb, He does not stop at restoring his life. Turning to those standing nearby, Jesus says, "Unbind him, and let him go free." Lazarus is alive, but he is still wrapped in the cloths of death. Life has returned, yet freedom must follow.

As we begin this new year, those words may speak directly to our own experience. Many of us are very much alive, faithfully showing up day after day, yet still bound by the weight of recent years, by grief, fear, anger, disappointment, or fatigue. The invitation of the Gospel is not to pretend those burdens do not exist, but to allow ourselves, with God's help, to be unbound. To loosen our grip on what keeps us tied to the tombs of the past, and to trust that God desires not only our survival, but our freedom.

The world around us remains uncertain. That reality does not change simply because the calendar does. And yet, as people of faith, we live in joyful hope. The medieval mystic Julian of Norwich, who lived in a time marked by plague and instability, clung to a promise she repeated often: "All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of thing will be well." Her words were not naïve optimism; they were an expression of deep trust in God's abiding presence and faithful love.

As a parish community, let us step into this new year with open hearts and open minds. Let us be willing, gently and honestly, to lay down the detritus and dark weight of the past year—or even many years—and to walk the new path ahead unburdened and free. May we support one another in this work, offering patience, compassion, and hope to all who walk beside us.

After *Hamnet* ends, one is reminded that the rest of Shakespeare's story still lay ahead. His greatest works were yet to be written, and their beauty continues to touch hearts and minds even today. As we begin this new year together, may we trust that our own story is far from finished. With

God's grace, the chapters yet to come may hold more life, more meaning, and more hope than we can yet imagine. With every blessing for the new year,

Msgr. Con