

Celebration of a New Ministry

for the

Reverend Julie Anna Johnson

Catherine Rickett

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Hixson, TN

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Deuteronomy 9:13-21 Psalm 48 Hebrews 3:12-19 John 2:13-22

“Nourish Christ’s people from the riches of his grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come.”

What a joyful occasion! Thanks be to God who brings us here today! We come together in joy; it is a time of pure celebration in Christ with one another. What a blessed treat this is. I am honored and humbled to be here today.

In these last few weeks I imagine that you have been finding out a few things about Julie. Know that she is, first and foremost, as we all are, a precious child of God. God loves her as God loves each of us, fully and purely; with Julie God is well-pleased.

Julie has many roles: pastor, priest and teacher; mother, wife, and friend. I know Julie as a friend and a sister; she is my sister not by blood but by choice; not by chance, but by the grace of God who honors and blesses our lives. Julie is family.

I am already hearing stories about you, her new parish family: someone wore pink on her first day. Others have already enjoyed her cooking – spaghetti, right? Ask her for chorizo and eggs on a day when you are feeling really blue. Her hands and her love – her gift of giving in that way – will cure those blues as they have for me. Her tears let us share in her laughter, joy, and sorrow, sometimes all mixed together in one wonderful moment.

Julie has a favorite theologian; I do not know if you know that yet. Some may think that her favorite theologian is Desmond Tutu; it is not. As much as Julie finds meaning in the prayers of Desmond Tutu, there is another theologian after whom Julie would like to model her life. That theologian, great in history, is ... Piglet. Yes, Piglet of Winnie the Pooh and Tigger and Eeyore. Piglet, Julie will tell you, is the kind of friend who will give his house away to one who needs it. That is the kind of friend that Julie strives to be. So Julie gives and loves and knows friendship on a level modeled after ... Piglet. They share a common love, a compassionate and passionate heart.

Julie comes to you today with these and many other gifts. These gifts are wrapped in obedience: obedience to God, the Church, and her bishop. She took those vows at her ordination. On that day, Julie was charged “to nourish Christ’s people from the riches of his grace, and strengthen them to glorify God in this life and in the life to come.” Obedience to such a vow is not an easy task. Nourishing and strengthening do not necessarily manifest themselves in the ways of popular culture. In being faithful to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the church, Julie will lead you through difficult times and difficult tasks.

Remember that this congregation also takes vows this day. Julie does not drift into your midst and then take charge of everything. You have invited her here, are welcoming her into your home. You have told the bishop, as the people of St. Alban's that you are "ready to continue in your ministry with Julie as your priest." Julie is entering into ministry that you are already doing. She is an addition to your existing work in the world. Share with her your customs, patterns, and practices. Invite her into your dreams for St. Alban's. Do not hide yourselves or Mother Julie from the sorrows and frustrations that come along the way. Living into ministry is hard work for all of us. She will join you, walk with you, share in your passions for ministry in this world when you allow her to do so.

Brothers and Sisters of St. Alban's, you have promised – offered – even more. You have asked Julie to join you "in the ministry of telling the Good News to the World." You get to share the saving power of Jesus the Christ not only with one another, but with the world! There is no better gift to give, no better gift to share with Julie. Sharing the saving power of Jesus Christ is neither an easy nor simple task.

Following God did not bring a life of pure joy to Moses. Moses smashed the tablets of the covenant – the covenant with God to God's people – and fell before the Lord because God's people had turned away from the covenant. The Israelite's broke their covenant with God and a distraught Moses smashed the tablets of that covenant. The people had cast an image of a calf, had cast that idol for themselves. This idol separated the people from God, took their attention and focused it on themselves. Moses crushed the idol that the people had made, turned to dust that which was taking them away from the Lord. Turn to dust your own false idols.

The writer of Hebrews warned the early Christians to "take care" not to have an "evil, unbelieving heart," but to turn to one another and to build one another up. "For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm until the end." Hold firm the confidence that you have as Christians in Hixson, TN. Hold firm the confidence that we share in the salvation of Jesus Christ. Hold firm in loving one another, and building up the body of Christ in this world. No one person can do this for you. God needs each and every one of us – our souls and bodies – in this world.

On this joyful occasion we hear about Jesus driving people out of the temple, overturning the tables of the money-changers. What a strange mixture of joy and sorrow, tears and fury, all in one moment. Jesus reminds us that his body is a temple; we destroy it in our greed and misunderstanding. Jesus' zeal is hard to understand; we have that level of passion for little, if anything in our lives. We are called to remember and to celebrate God's love for us in the resurrection of Jesus Christ with that level of zeal.

We do not want to give up our idols. Neither do we want to expend the energy to build up one another when we are struggling to keep our own faith on track. We would rather have money AND grace, our lives as we want them AND saving absolution. We keep those things within us that allow us to remain just outside of the temple doors. Part of nourishing people is showing us what we lose by staying outside of a life in Christ. Part of strengthening us is learning to glorify Christ with each and all of our lives.

Julie will take this journey with you. You will not always like what she in her obedience has to say. You will not always like what she in her humanity has to say. Love her anyway. Love her through your hard times and your good times. She already loves you, has promised to be pastor, priest, and teacher. She is at home with you in her vocation. Invite one another, brothers and sisters in Christ, to be exactly that: brothers and sisters. Nourish one another from the riches of Christ's grace; strengthen one another to glorify God in this life and in the life to come.