

There's a new grocery store in Sharon. People ask me, "Do you like the new store?"

"Yes," I say, "It's great. The best thing about it is that it seems so much more open. It used to feel like you were in a maze of high walls, and now it seems bright and open and you can see across the store."

That's the problem with walls. They make it impossible to see other people. This weekend was our Diocesan Convention. It was our first with the new Bishop Ian Douglas, and there was a bright, fresh feeling about the place on Friday and Saturday. It was the same cathedral, and we were the same delegates, but there was a new spirit in our deliberations.

Bp Douglas spoke in his address about being a new creation in Christ. And he spoke about God's main desire and main mission which is to reconcile us to each other, and to God, through Christ. There's nothing much new in that. We know that is what God is about, and why God brings us together in this place to be companions for each other on the Way.

But what made it different is that all throughout the convention there were stories sprinkled in. People were called on to share short stories of something significant in their lives about coming to faith, or seeing God's promises. So, we heard moving stories, funny stories, a story from a preacher about preaching in a black church in the south soon after the death of MLK Jr. We heard a story from a young woman who called 911 when her grandmother was having a stroke. The stories were from black, white and Hispanic people. They were stories from young and old, from city churches and country churches.

What these stories (you could also call them Gospel Witness) accomplished is that they made us one and bridged the separation between us all who although Episcopalians, were from very different parts of the diocese. The walls came down, these people became our people, and we were no longer strangers but friends.

In our parable from the Gospel of Luke today, there is a significant wall between the Pharisee and the tax collector. The one went home justified. Justification is a Biblical/theological term that also means reconciliation. Because of the humility of the tax collector, not because he's a perfect person – he is a tax collector – he is reconciled to God. The other man, the Pharisee, is righteous by definition, but he cannot be reconciled to either his fellow man, or to God because he cannot see the other man as a fellow human, and cannot see his own faults and thereby find some humility.

We will hear in a short time from Bill Kellett who graciously agreed to be the Chairman for Stewardship this year. He wrote us a compelling letter asking us all to consider what we pledge monetarily to Trinity Church each year. This morning we are asked to put our pledge cards in the plate you see here at the foot of the steps as we come up to receive communion. If our goal is God's

goal, if we seek reconciliation with each other and with God, then we become willing see what we do at Trinity as a common goal, a common mission and a mutual blessing. We do this in part with our budget and in part with our time and our gifts which we bring to support each other in God's great mission.