

Tonight is a very special night. Tonight is the night that we prepare for everything to come. It is the beginning of the end and the beginning of a new beginning. I get asked frequently why I liked being here so much. It's an easy question. But it's not a very easy answer.

Last week I got asked by a Minister somewhere else. And he said, What makes Saint Paul's so special? I said, What do you mean? He's like, well, it has to be someplace very special because everybody is talking about you guys. So why are you so special? And I said to him, the people. Why is your church not so special? And he looked at me and he's like, why do you say my church isn't so special. I'm like I didn't. You said your church isn't so special. That's the difference. You see your congregation as people. You see your congregation as simply people for you to talk to, people for you to lead, people for you to try and save. My church isn't like that. My church is a family. We've been here together for 50 years. We've been doing a Christmas Eve service like this together for 50 years. We took two separate churches and came together. Came together to make one. We've kept ministers here longer than most churches have even existed today. And we do it because of the people. We do it because of who we are, because of where we are, because we love each other more and more than most people can even imagine. We have wonderful traditions. We have wonderful parts of our lives that we share together. We also have a lot of opportunities.

We've come through a lot. Since covid. The past five years this church has changed in ways we couldn't even imagine before that. We couldn't even imagine at one point that we'd all still be sitting here today, but we are because we're a family, because we have come together through hardship. We have come together through grace. We have come together sharing God and Jesus's love more than most people could even imagine. And it's a beautiful, beautiful thing.

I was talking with Alyssa because when she grew up Christmas Eve wasn't about the birth of Christ. It was about the next day. It was about everything that happens after tonight. It was about what's next for them. But how can you have what's next if you don't have what's right now. If you don't have where you are, whether it's good or bad.

Do you know how The hymn Silent Night came about. It came because of a flood. A church was destroyed, demolished and all they had left of that church was the original poem Silent Night. There's a Catholic priest who wrote it on his way to do Mass one night. He left the directory. He was walking and wrote the whole poem in the time that it took him to get to church. And they did it for a Christmas Eve service. And then about five years later, the church got flooded; the town got flooded, The farms got destroyed all around it. And he didn't know what to do. They didn't have an organ. They didn't have a piano. All they had left of that church was this poem, this song. And they came together as a congregation And sang it. And it carried them forward,. Carried them to the what's next? It carried them through the hardships. And now we have that part.

We close every Christmas Eve service with that song, whether it originally was meant to be a tribute to the church or not. It's a tribute to us. Wherever I go over the Christmas season, and I hear Silent Night, I always think of this night. I always think of the time that we are all together, and I look forward to how the next year is going to come. What our what nexts are, where the church is going to go, the presence we're going to receive ,the joys, we're going to have sorrows too.

These candles are much more than just up here to light God's flame. They're here to remind us of our pillars of who we are. Of hope, of peace, of joy, of love, and they all come through Christ. God gave us each one of those hearts, each one of those covenants. He wrote upon our heart to share, to go, and to be merciful and happy to share his love and his wisdom in ways people without it can't even imagine. To share it, to bring them closer to us, and closer to him, because that's what it means to be here. That's what it means to be a part of this family, sharing that love at all times. I love you especially when it's really hard, we still do, we still pick each other up. We still carry each other on, and we get to do it because of God's love for us, giving us his only son tomorrow. So when we wake up the past is over. Yesterday was yesterday. Tomorrow will be now, and his love hasn't changed for us at all. Let us pray.