

**Bishop's Remarks**  
*(leading into group sessions after business)*  
**231<sup>st</sup> Diocesan Convention, First Business Session**  
**November 12, 2021**

Now I invite you to turn your attention to the garden of our common life.

Listen to these words from the portion of Hebrew scripture we are using from this convention: A root shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of its roots. Isaiah 11:1

Years ago, my mother took me to Memphis to see “The Secret Garden” at The Orpheum theatre. To this day, the opening scene, in which the actors waved crimson silk in large undulating gestures to convey the cholera epidemic in colonial India, remains an eidetic image in my mind. One song has fueled my hope, in more circumstances than I can count: Wick. “When a thing is wick, it has a life about it,” Dickon sings. “Now, maybe not a life like you and me. But somewhere there's a single streak of green inside it. Come, and let me show you what I mean.”

The human spirit is often mistaken for dead when, in fact, it is wick, bearing irrepressible life that pushes through the most hostile circumstances.

During the pandemic, we germinated plants from seeds in our family garden, mostly of things we had around the house. One afternoon last Spring, my son invited me to look very closely at a seedling that was sitting on our kitchen counter. He noted how the plant pulls up from the soil in a “u” shape as the tiny shoot literally pulls out of the seed, eventually dropping it off as the first leaves triumphantly reach toward the sun. Meanwhile, on the other end, a shoot pushes deeper into the soil, forming the root system of the plant. All of this effort emanates from within the seed, but not without help—from soil, water, nutrients, and sun. Just as a human body gestates a baby, so the seed gestates a new seedling. The same reproductive process we have is at work in plants.

Life. Pushing through the soil. Preparing to become full and fruit-bearing.

You know, I thought about so many themes for this Convention. After all, it's my first one with you—so, I've been a bit obsessed! I thought about all the doing, dancing, singing, leaping, climbing, feasting—action-packed kind of verbs. They're all good.

But, every time I'd think of a new one, this image kept coming back to me. What is that, I thought? It was this image of something tiny and green. I realized, what I kept seeing were images of the tiny seedlings we had in Dixie cups on our kitchen counter during the pandemic. Plants that now our beloved chosen niece, Mercy, is tending back in Denver.

Why am I thinking about those tiny plants?— I wondered.

I didn't really have my answer until I'd made it to my first dozen or so congregations across the diocese. I kept listening to all these stories you told me. Stories of you, tending what was wick in our garden.

Stories of you, clearing away the dead parts so the tender buds could form. Stories of you, giving a living thing a little chance to grow.

Abiding is not passive. It points to what happens when a vine pushes through the depths of the ground and simultaneously up toward the sun.

To abide is to engage fully the resources around you so you can thrive. Like the plant takes in the nutrients, the rain and the sun, when we abide, we press our roots deeply into the Spirit and stretch our hearts heavenward to receive God's gifts for our lives.

You, Saints of God, have been abiding. You have been tending what is wick. You have loosened the soil, you have cleared away the dead parts so the tender buds could form.

By the work of your hands you have carved altars and pulpits, you have carried prayerbooks to bars and docks and funeral homes. You have cared for the sick. You have hung your flag out on roadsides and welcomed the stranger in. You have tutored our youth, you have made sure families could eat, you have advocated for racial justice and marriage equality, you have insisted Jesus really meant all are welcome, you have taught our children. You have kept the lights on and kept our faith visible in every corner of this diocese.

You have abided in this place. Because of you—what was wick has found its life again. Because of you—what might have been given up for dead is thriving. When a thing is wick, and someone cares about it. And comes to work each day, like you and me—it will grow.

This evening, as we are gathered together to begin a new season, I want to give space for you to reflect a bit on what it's been like for you to abide in the midst of hardship and challenge for over a decade. I think this is an important moment for us to see, to really see, just how profound your abiding has been.

In a few minutes, we're going to invite you to share some reflections on your abiding in your own churches. First, let's listen to a few folks from around the diocese share what abiding looks like to them. [Link to video](#)