It was the late 1930’s when author Thomas Wolfe proclaimed, “You can’t go home again.” In 1970 Simon and Garfunkel sang the hit song “Gee but it’s great to be back home.”

I concluded 18 years of ministry as dean of Trinity Cathedral in 2005. Since then a lot has happened in our lives and in the life and ministry of this Cathedral in the last 13 years. This is not the same home it was and Wolfe was correct that none of us can return to 2005 or 1955 or any other time in the past.

That said, home may be different but it is still home. I’m feeling the truth of Simon and Garfunkel and want to say, “Gee but it’s great to be back home” here at Trinity Cathedral. Thank you Dean Richardson for inviting me back home.

Just to give us some context, I’d like any of you who were here prior to February of 2005 to stand as you are able. Now would those of you who became part of Trinity after that date please stand.

What unites us together in this wonderful congregation is our commitment to Jesus and the ministry he spoke of in today’s Gospel lesson.

Jesus told his disciples, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrant over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

We live in a contentious and I believe, dangerous time for us as a nation built on the ideals of democracy. Many commentators have pointed to the fact that in our nation we no longer find it easy to talk with others about
our common life and purpose as a nation. There is a divisive and malevolent spirit to which we as Christians must bring a spirit of love and resistance (and the two can go together). We must find ways to be instruments of truth while at the same time doing our best to be reconcilers.

The urge to divide and disrupt is evident in today’s Gospel reading. We hear about people, followers of Jesus, who were busy grasping for power in their community, folks who cared more about winning status or making money than about living out Jesus’ mission of love, integrity, compassion, and reconciliation to people and a world that is broken in so many ways.

You may have noticed in the Gospel that the disciples were arguing with each other as they also tried to jockey for a higher position in the Jesus community. But we know that eventually they were able to find their commitment to Jesus and his mission to be the glue that held them together.

This was ultimately a community shaped by the belief that following Jesus meant living up to his expectations about building a new world where love and justice would prevail over differences of opinion, where doing the will of Jesus was more important than arguments and disputations...be they secular or theological.

There is an apocryphal story about a fleeing outlaw in the old west, desperate for water as he plodded through the desert when much to his surprise he saw something far off in the distance.

Hoping to find water, he hurried toward the mirage, only to find a very frail little old man standing at a small makeshift display rack - selling ties.

The outlaw asked, "Do you have water? The old man replied, "I have no water. Would you like to buy a tie? They are only $5."

The outlaw shouted hysterically, "Idiot! I do not need such an over-priced silly tie - I spit on your ties. I need water!"
"Sorry, I have none - just ties - pure silk - and only $5."

"Old man! A curse on your ties, I should wrap one around your scrawny little neck and choke the life out of you, but I must conserve my energy and find water!"

"Okay," said the little old man, it does not matter that you do not want to buy a tie from me or that you hate me, threaten my life and call me names. I will show you that I am bigger than any of that.

If you continue over that hill to the east for about two miles, you will find a restaurant. It has the finest food and all the ice-cold water you need...Go In Peace!"

Cursing him again, the desperate outlaw staggered away over the hill.

Several hours later, the outlaw crawled back, almost dead and gasped, "They won’t let me in without a tie!

Here at Trinity, anyone can enter without a physical tie. Those of you who have worshiped and been nourished over the years by the many ministries within this cathedral and outward to the larger community, know that you are members of a community that ties you to Christ and his mission. If you are new to this Cathedral, as you become more involved, you will discover a community that will be a blessing in your life.

Before the Gospel reading we sang, “Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.” The hymn recognizes that our prayers, fears, our cares, woes and tears, even our disagreements, all these aspects of life tie us together.... The hymn recognizes that we are joined and indeed, transformed, by the love and heart of Christ.

During this interim period, you as a congregation will be talking with each other about what this cathedral is to be for those of you who are here, for the larger diocesan community, and for those folks who for a variety of reasons will be drawn to this place of prayer and transformation in the years ahead.

A cathedral in the Anglican tradition is meant to be, as a former dean of Westminster Abbey stated,
“a church in which all questing men and women, irrespective of faith and race, would ‘see Jesus’ and behold the glory of God.”

I’m sure Dean Richardson, the Cathedral vestry and search committee will be encouraging each of you to become involved in helping discern what sort of visionary leader you want to call as your next dean. Please, for the sake of this wonderful congregation, for your sake as a person who is seeking to know the mind and hope of Jesus for this congregation, do get involved in helping shape the future of Trinity. Participate however you are able. Be generous with your time and financial support during this time of transition.

Let this interim period be a time for you to deepen your faith, to interact with each other with honesty, love, and compassion as you engage in ministry in the life of this wonderful community.

If you will turn your gaze to the east transept, a large icon that depicts the Old Testament characters of Abraham and Sarah providing hospitality to three individuals who unbeknownst to them are actually representations of God the Creator, Jesus the redeemer, and the life changing Holy Spirit.

Hospitality, unconditional love as depicted in the Trinity icon, love and care for others, no matter who they are, how they live, or what they believe, these are the ties that bind us to Christ and each other.

This Cathedral, like each one of us, is on a quest that involves nurturing our faith as we engage in living and promoting Christ’s prophetic mission of healing and love to the lost, the lonely, the needy and all who seek to know and to be changed into people who have been changed and empowered to love others with the love of Jesus. We can do this, we must do this, and with God’s help we will do this.

Now I have one request. This week, find at least one person to interact with, someone you know or someone who is a stranger, and be the understanding, loving
presence of God to that person, at that moment of
encounter. That may or may not be an interaction that is life
changing for that individual.

I promise you that if you reach out in love to others,
as Christ loves you, your tie to Christ and the amazing
presence of our Holy God will be transformative for you and
very possibly for many others. Often this is not easy or
comfortable but it is life changing.

Blest be the tie that binds us to Christ, to each other,
and to this amazing congregation. AMEN