May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you O Lord, our rock and our Redeemer.

Today’s reading from Acts, and the Gospel discuss Jesus saying goodbye to his disciples. It seems an apt segue into us saying “Auf Wiedersehen” (which means till we next see each other) to St. Peter’s. We are not saying Goodbye – you won’t get rid of us that easily.

Lewis Carroll wrote, “The time has come the walrus said to speak of many things; of shoes and ships and sealing wax, of cabbages and kings”.

I’ll leave shoes to Carrie Monahan, ships to John Newman and skip sealing wax, cabbages and kings. However there are other things I want to discuss. Then Ann will give her own take on this rather momentous day. We are always, of course, balanced between past and future, but it feels particularly vivid to me right now.

I was raised Anglican (and confirmed in the Church of England) but became an agnostic in my twenties. I believed there was a God (I could not accept that creation occurred by accident), but had no confidence that Christianity was the channel to God, or for that matter understood God.

Ann joined St. Peter’s in about 1995. For several years I attended St. Peter’s on High Holy Days (at Ann’s urging), and helped out occasionally in non liturgical ways. I got to know and respect Manny. I did not partake of Eucharist because it did not seem appropriate. Then in 2004 Ann was diagnosed with Colon cancer. It changed everything.

Ann and I went to the Wednesday Eucharist after she was diagnosed (at 8 am in the old chance with the choir pews facing each other) to pray for her recovery. I decided it was time to take Communion and Ann beamed. I offered to attend the Friday Morning Bible Study group in her place, as I knew that group was very important to her.

I was gradually returning to Christianity at that time. This led to my joining St. Peter’s (much to Ann’s delight). I started attending regularly and taking Communion. Since then this has been my faith community and fed me in so many ways. I am so grateful to all of you, present and past.

This church is a marvelous faith community. Worshiping here I really feel a member of that unified body. We don’t all believe the same thing (and we have spirited theological arguments, especially at Friday Morning Bible Study) but there are no little cliques, no in-groups and I don’t see people who feel excluded. Manny frequently preaches inclusivity and in this case he is preaching to the choir. The Scots talk about thin places (where you are closer to God than normal). For me St. Peter’s is such a thin place.
Our iconic churches are a silent advertisement of our faith communities. In particular First Baptist, Second Congregational, St Mary Star of the Sea and St. Peter’s are such buildings. They all shout “God is here on this Earth, in this time. Welcome to our Church where you may find refuge.” They say this in good times and in bad (very comforting in bad times). This is why I am so glad we maintain our beautiful Church, even though it is expensive.

We do great outreach, especially Friday and Sunday Night Suppers, which bring together other faith communities in our building. But can we do more? Can we actively engage the communities in Beverly to discern their needs? On Wednesdays we use the Iona Eucharist for Communion. In the prayers the leader says, “We pray for the sick, the bereaved, the oppressed and the homeless”, and we respond “We are embodied with them now”. Can we do more, you here in Beverly, and Ann and I as we make our new home in South East Connecticut, to be embodied with them now?

First Baptist has built many apartments for the elderly, Harborlight, Turtle Creek, Turtle Woods and others. They did this by taking risks with their endowment and being willing to underwrite efforts to meet Beverly’s needs. I do not believe there is a pressing need in Beverly for elderly housing any longer, but I am sure there are other pressing needs. Let’s find out how we should serve God best, we in Connecticut and you here in our parish home.

Thank you for being my friends and spiritual mentors. I will miss you, but will return from time to time.

Auf Wiedersehen.

Godfrey Perrott