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Induction of Brandon Haynes
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Most people love a beach vacation. If you live in the Midwest, you don't need to head all the way to California or Florida. Instead, you can get in a car and drive to Indiana, more specifically to the somewhat confusingly-named town of Michigan City, Indiana, which is situated on the south end of Lake Michigan. There you will find low, rolling dunes of sand, and on windy days a few waves, all good enough to make it a beach, but without the hordes of tourists way too familiar on the Gulf Coast, or as we Southerners are honest enough to call it, the Redneck Riviera.

The beach at Michigan City presents a pleasant beach landscape, but it did not always look as it does today. In the 19th century, it is estimated that the largest dune there rose at least 200 feet. Contemporary descriptions and photographs show a very broad, massive dune, with its slopes partly wooded. By Midwest standards, a virtual mountain. This pristine and ancient dune, rising like a large hill, dominated the landscape.

But then greed took over. You see, sand is an ingredient of glass. And the sand in the dune there had a specific mineral content, which, when heated, turned the resulting glass into a distinctive shade of blue that manufacturers turned into canning jars. You may have seen a few of those remaining blue-glass jars in antique shops. They were a successful commercial product, so much so that the six million cubic yards of sand used for blue-glass jar production eliminated the entire dune by 1920. For a while, those glass jars were a symbol of what human ingenuity could do. Filled with summer fruit, a homemaker had something of which to be proud. Go to the fair and win a blue ribbon. Be known as the best.

But you know what happens to glass: eventually it breaks. Not just blue canning jars, but all sorts of glass products, from tumblers to mirrors to light bulbs. What was once so well made shatters. Indeed, such a deterioration happens to all things. Buildings collapse, eggs break, people grow old. Physicists have a name for the process: they call it the second law of thermodynamics, a fancy way of saying that things go from orderly to

disorderly; it is the nature of the universe. It is why ice melts and our clothing wears out. If you want to contemplate it in theological terms, think of the Garden of Eden as the orderly, idyllic beginning, a newly created perfect order, and the resulting broken world today as what we are left with. As it is with glass, so it is with humanity.

We are here today to inaugurate something new and perhaps with a bit of pride thrown in: the installation and institution and induction of Brandon as your new dean and rector. I wish we had a different name for what is taking place. Installation is indeed the word that the Prayer Book uses when talking specifically about new deans. That word sounds more like what happens when a plumber is called in to replace the old hot water heater. a water heater, which, by the way, is being replaced precisely because it went from orderly to disorderly, from whole to broken. Something new had to take its place.

But we are not simply putting Brandon in place so much as we are inaugurating a new relationship between Brandon and the congregation. This day is about ALL of you. Perhaps “marriage” might be a better word to use. I have been around this job long enough to know that “for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health” is more what we are talking about today as your future together than are words such as institution and induction and installation.

Whatever happens here in the coming years is going to be a team effort. I pray that it will be fruitful for making the kingdom of God a present reality. Brandon has already done good and hard work as a priest in a congregation in Arkansas that was sometimes as disorderly and as broken as any I have seen. I thank him for that work.

But that is the past. We are here today about what can happen in the future. The future is about, as I said a moment ago, making the kingdom of God a present reality, about hungers of life being overcome, sometimes literally in the guise of a food pantry, and more often metaphorically in the guise of people who walk through the door of a church hungry for something more fulfilling in their lives. Such people get fed literally at the holy table and fed metaphorically through listening ears and outstretched arms and recognition by you that they are valued.

How does it happen? Well, here is what to remember. The days are over when only the finest of people came through our church doors, people who already were sitting on top of the mountain, or dune, to use my beach example. People are not going to come to you with pristine, orderly lives. They are not going to bring nice canning jars filled with summer's fruit as a gift that announces their success, as you simultaneously hope they bring nice financial support as well. Those jars are long emptied. No, they are more likely to come with lots of baggage, probably similar to the baggage that is already evident in this room in many of our own stories as well, whether we admit it or not: broken lives, shattered promises, broken health, shattered finances, broken relationships. People are going to come through these doors bringing a lot of broken glass from all the things in their lives that have gone from orderly to disorderly. As it is with glass, so it is with humanity. They will metaphorically drop that glass jar on the floor of the church because they cannot hold on to it any longer, and they are going to ask you how to make sense of what has happened. That is when the today's gospel will start to become a bit uncomfortable, as Jesus talks about our call to serve others.

If we are true to that call, we will end up walking on that broken glass, walk with them through the pain of their broken dreams and messy lives. Show them that they are valued. Show them that we are not afraid to get down in what is sometimes dirty water, as Philip was willing to do in today's first lesson, when the call to serve was to baptize a dusty eunuch who had heard some good news and wanted to experience it.

Remember when I earlier mentioned the second law of thermodynamics. The theory tells us that we are not going to broken glass back into jars and back into a pristine dune overlooking a huge lake. We are not going to unbreak the egg or turn the elderly person with failing health back into a teenager. When someone comes into the church trying to figure out why they lost the job or the spouse or simply made way too many wrong decisions in life, we are not going to be able to undo any of it.

So far I have talked about the bad news of life. But it is time to turn to the good news. Here is what we can do. We can help clear the path of that broken glass so that something new can happen, so that a new journey can begin. The something new that can happen is nothing less than what, in theological language, we call resurrection. At the end of the day, it is the great gift that the church has to offer. We need not wait until we physically die to be resurrected.

Lives can have new meaning in the here and now. New relationships can be formed. We Christians serve so that people can look at the same old broken world in a new way. That is a powerful form of resurrection. Broken glass does not have to be the end of the story.

And it is not simply for the new person who will come through these doors in search of something different where resurrection is seen. We serve so that we ourselves can discover resurrection in our own lives when we become generous and loving and walk beside others not so fortunate, even if at some times such generosity and love are uncomfortable, sort of like walking on broken glass. You see, we have a story to share, a story about a new way to live, a story about resurrection that runs counter to the dominant story of this competitive and often cruel world, where the only marker these days seems to be that of success, made possible by a willingness to ignore or smash others for one's own delight.

What we are inaugurating here today is preparing ourselves to share good news, to be evangelists, to tell the story —and to live the story by example— that a new and different life is possible after the many deaths that every last one of us has experienced. That new way to look at the same old world. We keep the doors open, we feed people in liturgy and love and sometimes in an actual meal for a hungry stomach; we walk on the broken glass of this world and clear a path. We help people sweep it aside so that the future will be better than the past, so this journey called life will be easier to make. That is indeed resurrection, and I hope it is what you and Brandon will find the courage to undertake in this part of the kingdom of God. Amen.