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## *I Want to Tell You Another Story*

**An article for *The Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler, *Dean of the Cathedral*  
February 2, 2025**

Let me tell you another story. (And please read until the end!) The earliest United States observance of something called Groundhog Day dates back to the nineteenth century, maybe in the decades before the founding of the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club, in 1899. But before there was Groundhog Day, there was another story. It was Candlemas, an ancient Christian celebration of light occurring at the mid-point of winter (a cross-quarter day), around February 2.

The Christian Church exists to witness to these older traditions, and we will do so this Sunday, February 2, at the Cathedral Parish of St. Philip. Join us! Bring candles to be blessed! Bring some light into the world! Our observance will be another way that we give witness to a life that goes beyond what the world offers!

And, another story: Before there were social media posts, before there were knee-jerk reactions to every eerie syllable that one might imagine, the Christian Church has witnessed to the value of long-lasting traditions, the value of that kind of prayer which takes years to practice, the value of wise theology which takes time.

From time to time, eager and earnest parishioners have wanted good preachers to mention this or that in their sermons. Are you going to mention “such-and-such” this week? Sometimes those preachers do; sometimes they don’t. Those of you who attend church over time know that good preachers become good by taking their time, by holding fast to a witness and a message that takes time to form.

We might think that the challenge of how preachers respond to contemporaneous political events is a new phenomenon. No. Good preachers have always considered how they are to preach the distinctive Christian witness to God and the world. Good preachers know that they are not meant simply to mimic whatever loud partisan voice is being shouted that day.

Some church members, sometimes, want it to be otherwise. We say things like, “My particular position on this issue is so dire to me that I want, I need, my minister to comment on it this week!” or even, “If my minister does not say such-and-such this week, then I am leaving the parish.” Sometimes, sadly, they do.

And the person who only occasionally visits church can sometimes hear things, many things besides the sermon, that they do not usually hear! In the Episcopal Church, for instance, we pray most every week something that goes like this: “We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us.” You do not have to pray that; but we pray it in our church most every week.

This is our story. This is part of our language. As the great twentieth-century philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, might say, it is part of our grammar. (Paul Holmer called it our “grammar of faith.”) Wittgenstein used the term “language games” to refer to the way various communities use language in their “forms of life.” By “language game,” Wittgenstein did not at all mean something trivial or shallow; he meant the way communities seriously develop our forms of life, our stories.

Those of you who hear me preach, week in and week out, know that I try to witness to a particular message. Sometimes it works; sometimes it doesn’t. But the story that I preach is from a different world than the one we see blasted to us on social media accounts, or hear in loud television transmissions. I want to tell you another story.

So, for those who would have me comment upon the latest social media dagger, either to applaud the jab or to condemn it, I hope you will understand my response: I am not a pawn in that game. It may be a fine game; it

may be, for some, the most comfortable way of living in, and engaging, the world. But it is not the only game in the world. I am trying to be part of a larger and more long-lasting story, one that was named long ago in Jesus Christ, and started even before Christ.

My story has endured through all sorts of turmoil, and all sorts of joy. And the story to which I try to give witness is not some cute and quaint groundhog day story. The Christian witness has changed the world, for the better, time and time again. It has taken seriously the words of Jesus (and Isaiah) which we heard in our scheduled lectionary just this past Sunday in church: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19).

Whether I am the preacher or not, I go to church. I go to church in order to see another world, in order to be part of another world. The people and the beauty and the culture transport me to another place. The preaching does. The music does. The prayer does. And the stories do! Oh my! The stories! Our present news media stories have nothing on the long-lasting stories of the Bible. Read them! (In my weekly bible studies right now at church, we are reading about the erratic character of King David!)

Yes, there is another story than the one you might be hearing the loudest right now. And there is another light! There is another way to spend your time. Join a community of faith, one whose language and culture have been around for a long time.

I leave you with a proverb from 1678 (before there was such a thing as "Groundhog Day"):

If Candlemas day be fair and bright  
Winter will have another flight  
If on Candlemas day it be shower and rain  
Winter is gone and will not come again.  
(John Ray, 1678)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip