

May I speak in the name of God, Giver, Comforter and Lover. Amen.

Sometimes actions speak louder than words. Today's service is one of words, to be sure, but it is also one of actions. By being here you are showing your solidarity with those who have been affected by the layoffs. Whether you have found out that your job no longer exists, whether you are a co-worker or whether you are one of the many wider friends of the Dartmouth community, today we are here because we need each other.

I can only imagine how hard it must be for those who have had their jobs taken from them. The very language of job losses seems to hide something important about what must be going on for all those who have lost their jobs. A job taken away because of budget cuts outside your own control is not something lost in the sense of something being accidentally mislaid. By contrast, today we grieve for those who are experiencing the profound loss of employment, and along with it the financial, emotional, social and spiritual rewards that work brings. As hard as we might try not to define ourselves through our work, we need work: and today's cuts are a terrible loss to workers, families and the wider community. Through no fault of their own those who discovered they no longer have employment are right to be anything from angry and resentful to disappointed, grief stricken and a host of other emotions.

I know that there are also those within the Dartmouth community here today who may not have lost their job recently; and our hearts also go out to you. With a second round of cuts to be announced it is natural that many of you will be deeply anxious about what the

future holds. We also hold in our hearts and prayers those who have had to and will make again the difficult decisions that lead to job losses.

As your church family, and as a family profoundly interconnected with the life of the college, in the middle of deeply difficult and uncertain times you need to know that we stand with all who are hurting from the layoffs. And whether or not you are a member of this church, we are here for you. Every person in this church will in some way be affected by the upheaval in the college. And although it could have been a lot worse that is absolutely no consolation to those who have worked tirelessly for the college only to see their positions set aside.

Our prayers are with you and the whole Dartmouth community, and I personally hope that in the days and months ahead you will be able to speak with your clergy and your church family about ways in which we can support you at this hard time.

For now, I urge you to take advantage of the anointing and the laying on of hands that is available today. In anointing and the laying on of hands we see what the actions of a Christian community look like. In the oil of anointing we are reminded of the consolation of God's love, and the fact that God sees each of us as uniquely precious and uniquely loved. At a time when it is natural to question one's self-worth, the oil of anointing tells us that in God's eyes no one is redundant, and each one of us is needed. God needs you to know that. In the anointing with oil each of us is reminded of the Christian belief that in the sight of God you are not only beloved, but you are part of a royal family, a chosen people.

In the laying on of hands the church demonstrates through the power of touch the presence of God in the middle of difficult times. As Christians we are urged to see God not in the corridors of power or the counsels of the mighty, but in those who suffer. And whether your suffering is in mind, body or spirit, the laying on of hands is meant as both a comfort and a sign of the fundamental solidarity of God with those who are broken.

In case anyone here today thinks that none of this is for you, you may wish to think again. However isolated and insulated you may be from the job losses, and however perfect your mental or physical health may be, each of us is asked to recognize that we all need the wholeness and healing that comes from God alone.

So I urge each of you to look into your heart. If there is something that disturbs you or makes you anxious, consider receiving the anointing and laying on of hands. Whether you have lost your job, whether you are concerned about your job security, or whether you have other losses and burdens that you are concerned about, the ministry of wholeness and healing is for you. Here at St Thomas we have a trained team of parish members who have received special permission to participate in the laying on of hands. Every Sunday their ministry is available during our ten o'clock service. And on Sundays they are available to hear your prayer requests and pray with you for wholeness and healing.

By contrast, in a few moments when we offer you the anointing and the laying on of hands we will do so in such a way that requires nothing of you. There is no need to tell us why you are here. There is no need to verbalize where it is that you seek wholeness and healing. And you do not have to tell us who you are or where you

have come from. And, of course, you can come forward just for anointing with oil, or just for the laying on of hands, or for neither. It is entirely up to you.

Today we want you to know that we have faith and trust in the God of grace, and we hope that you will find consolation and encouragement in the simplicity of prayer, oil and touch. In these sacred actions millions of Christians have found consolation, healing and wholeness. We hope you might too.

Lastly I encourage you to continue to care for one another and stand in solidarity with those who are hurting at this time. There will be members of this parish who are directly affected by the job losses, and even if you are not one of them I know that you will be reaching out to them with love and prayers in the days ahead. When you do that know that the anointing and laying on of hands that you receive today can be used both for yourself and also to strengthen you in your compassion and care for one another.

Christ is with us not just in prayer, oil and laying on of hands. Christ is with us when we seek him in those who suffer in mind, body or spirit. However raw we feel right now, I hope and pray that we may continue to reach out to one another. And while it may not seem possible now, let us pray that God will transform loss and suffering into opportunities for renewal and rebirth. Amen.