

April 22, 2018

Year B; 4th Sunday of Easter; Good Shepherd Sunday

Acts 4: 5-12

Psalm 23

1 John 3: 16-24

John 10: 11-18

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

A week ago today was the last day of my vacation. Tim and I had come home 2 days early from our stay in North Carolina, as that little stretch of 70 degree days was here and I was itching to be home and to work in my garden!

So one week ago at exactly this hour I was in my garden weeding, tending checking, digging, planting....a great and deep joy for me, and renewing of my body, mind and spirit.

And as I dug and worked I thought of you all, very fondly, sitting in church with Kaki, gathered for church....And as I worked I prayed, for you all and so many on my heart....

And after awhile of so deeply enjoying the quiet and the beauty and the birds singing and the warm sunshine and so grateful for God’s creation and the blessing of energy and strength to do that work with only some aches and pains....and being aware of the fleeting quality of life and treasuring such hours....and treasuring all hours....

Well, I thought, this is just like worship: closeness to God and conversation with God, quiet to hear the Spirit, prayers of thanksgiving and healing.....and my garden got cleaned up at the same time!

So, I had my moment, yes, even a priest, even a rector, and I imagine even bishops sometimes, have that moment and wonder....well, why can’t I just have church here?....in my garden, on my porch, on my boat, in my favorite chair.....?

And yes, of course, we can and do and must connect with our God in moments alone, and we need times apart....but if we are Christians and we are serious about being Christians, ours is a faith that is not primarily solitary...To be Christians is to live together, to pray together, to help together, to listen together....to be the church together....

Jesus did not start out in his time on earth.....figuring he would do this alone....No! He gathered folks around him, men and women, he called people to be with him..... to travel with him.....

Before Christianity became Christianity...it was a community around and with Jesus.

And of course, on this Good Shepherd Sunday we hear of the rich images of Jesus as the good shepherd, as the shepherd that loves us and cares for us and includes us and comes looking for the one that is lost, and brings that one back to the community, together.....the flock...

The shepherd lives with and protects the sheep.....but not one at a time but as the flock...as.....us.

Which brings us to us....Trinity/SMWC....a flock ...a community...a church....living out our faith as Christians.....together....

And small churches like we are....small churches I believe, live most deeply into our call to live together.....to live as Christians.....to live in community.

I have served in churches with 800 on Sunday morning, I have served in churches with 200 on Sunday morning and now I am with you all with 30 or 40 on Sunday.

As you probably know if you have attended larger churches...lots of folks go to larger churches because they do not want to be accountable for their life in the community of the church.

I do not mean for that to sound harsh...I am simply saying that large churches allow for folks to come and go as they please...being in community when they feel the need, or when convenient...or when they need the church for marrying or burying!

But otherwise, in a large church, you can disappear....you are not accountable but you also might not even be missed if you wandered off....

Part of my feeling called to be with you all, was a sense in me of wanting to minister in communities that I could get my arms around....to know my flock well.....

As you probably well know....You are not anonymous in a small church, not for long! You can not hide, and those who attend and love small churches do not want to hide, or to be without account for when you are here.

In a small church you are known, you are part of the community, part of the flock, known and needed.....

And along with the gift of being known and belonging also comes the responsibility.....In small churches everyone is needed and each of you is missed when you are not here.

Now I have to stop and offer a BIG disclaimer before I go on.

I am not preaching this sermon to make ANYONE feel guilty when they are not in church. I so so understand how busy and complex our lives are, and PLEASE do not feel a need to now tell me when and why you miss church! PLEASE!

But, know that you are needed, and missed, so when you can be here, I hope you will be here.

We need each other, and whenever a newcomer visits we need to welcome them together.....to show them who we are as our church....our community....yes, our home.....to help a new sheep to find their way home.

Our closing hymn today is one of my favorites... and speaks of home....on this Good Shepherd Sunday...."My Shepherd will supply my need".

The final verse seems to me to be written for the unique and beautiful communities that are small churches:

"...Oh may thy house be mine abode and all my work be praise...There would I find a settled rest, while others go and come; no more a stranger or a guest but like a child at home."

Children of God all of us together in a small church, not strangers butat home, at home....alleluia!

Amen.

The Reverend Megan Limburg