

The Conviction of Things Not Seen, Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 and Luke 12:32-40 August 7, 2022

Dear Friends – I am so glad to be here with all of you today as our congregation, one of Jesus' little flocks, begins to walk together through this time of change. I have always loved the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, so I was glad that Luke mentions the little flock in his Gospel and that we got to hear more about the Good Shepherd in our Time For All Ages.

I also love that in our Time for All Ages story we got to hear how Jesus knew other shepherds and many sheep, whether in his flock or not. As the story said "Shepherds made their living by caring for their sheep. They guided their flocks to water and to grass and to safe places for the night. Jesus spent time with them and saw how they cared about their sheep."

For the last 10 years I have been, and will continue for another three months, to be your shepherd. For those of you who were 10 years ago you might remember that when I was called to Trinity, I was adamant, if not arrogant, that I was not a shepherd. I was and am a sheep dog trying to get our group attention back to the Good Shepherd – the one we know and love in Jesus. Like every other flock we wander plenty and we depend on such a loving Spirit to call us home.

In many ways I still feel more like a sheep dog than a shepherd, but over this decade I have also embraced the shepherd role. Because you keep reminding me, and Jesus keeps reminding me what we all know so well. Which is that the pastor, me, and other pastors who have been with you in the past and who will be coming in the future, is not just in the business of rounding up the flock, but in caring deeply for and about the people. As I care so deeply for and about all of you.

Luke started his message this morning by recalling how Jesus said, "Do not be afraid little flock for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom... for where your treasure is there your heart will be."

What an honor and a joy it is to be a shepherd among shepherds. Because of course there are other shepherds here in this little flock. Our Leadership Team, the cooks and servers of our community meal, the volunteers at the clothes closet, all of you, young and old, who notice who is not with us on any Sunday and who reach out to find the missing one. Those of you who welcome visitors and members alike with a smile. Those who keep the lights lit on Sundays and shepherd us with music and prayer. Those who know what we need to be healthy and happy. Those who know God and who know the Good Shepherd.

This morning our Gospel and our Letter to the Hebrews and the Time for All Ages story too are about waiting in faith and expectation, "dressed for action" with our lamps lit. If you take the time to read that letter to the Hebrews again you might notice that the phrase "by faith" is repeated five times. It almost sounds like the steady beating of a heart. By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith. By faith.

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

You might know what you hope for but what things are unseen? The future. Trust. The next pastor to step up into this pulpit. What is around the corner but is out of sight. You name it, just about everything that God calls us to is unseen. As another letter, this one to the people of Corinth, says so well "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

Abraham, and now all of us, set out, not knowing where exactly we are going. The sheep do not know where the shepherd will guide them. The servants do not know when the master will return from the banquet. What we desire, and this really is at the core of our faith, is to trust that, seen or unseen, we dwell in the presence of God. We desire to dwell, in what the letter to the Hebrews calls "a better country." Not another place but another, stronger perhaps, sense of God with us.

For the next three months all of us, pastor, and people, will practice living into our great desire to be in God's presence while trusting that God desires the best for us. For Dorrie and me as we move back to Amherst. For all of you as we continue to gather in prayer as the caring flock you are. For our communities that we are committed to. In faith and trust and in hope that we will all stay close to the Good Shepherd who knows us and loves us and cares for and about us.

I am glad that today is Communion Sunday. Soon we will break bread and share juice in the tradition of the Episcopal side of our family. We will end with a prayer of Thanksgiving. As we have so much to be grateful for now, why wait till we share communion? Will you pray with me?

Gracious God, thank you for giving to us from your heart and helping us to give our treasures back to you and back to the world. Help us to stay awake, in readiness for all the ways that you come when we do not expect you to show up. Help us to show up for each other every day, setting the welcome table, lighting the light of love, and opening to door to our future. Amen