

Homily: May 5th, 2019          Easter 3, Year C          Susan Campbell Sandri, PhD  
 Acts 9:1-20,    Psalm 30,          Revelation 5:11-14,          John 21:1-19

*Loving God, open our hearts so that we may hear your Word and live in your Spirit. Amen*

*Simon son of John, do you love me?    Lord, You know that I love You.  
 Feed my lambs.*

One cannot consider this passage from John without hearing that love for our Lord calls for reciprocity, for action on our part. We mustn't just put on our Sunday clothes and come on over to hear him, leaving others to drag the nets. It's tempting, though.

Early in January, while - as Clerk - I was trying to get everything ready for the annual meeting, and hadn't yet written my Christmas cards because the holidays are always so busy, and I thought we were going to be listing our house and moving in March or April, and I knew I'd be returning to choreography this year, and I hadn't yet had time to pack for our imminent departure to our timeshare in Cabo -- -- -- I decided it was time for me to **step out** of being the Clerk of the Vestry, a time-consuming, invisible and often thankless job (be sure to thank our new Clerk, Celia Metz!). Sheepishly, I went to tell Frank & Elaine, knowing that the timing of my departure wasn't that great (because Nigel was retiring) and that (because of term limits) they both were *also* going off the Vestry. When I disclosed my decision I saw this look in their eyes - something between dismay and panic. In that weak moment, of not wanting to let them down ('cuz who could ever upset Elaine on purpose? or fail to support the visionary leadership of Frank?), in that weak moment I said, "...but I'm willing to run for the Vestry." Wait! Did I really say that? Their faces changed in an instant! I briefly thought, whew(!) they aren't disappointed in me -- and then they looked at each other -- and then they looked back, and simultaneously said, "Oh Good! You can be senior warden!"

Two days later, as I lay basking by the pool in Cabo with my mango margarita, afraid to tell my husband that I had agreed to run for the Vestry again, I pondered and prayed and tried to imagine how being senior warden during the transition from Nigel to Interim could possibly fit in my life. I tried to discern whether I had the sensitivity to hear the concerns of our congregation? The grace to assuage anxiety? The skills to navigate the beginning of our new journey? The courage to face the "slings and arrows" most certainly ahead? Hmmmm....

**Nope!** Surely *someone else* would be better at hauling *those* important nets. Someone stronger, someone with more energy to *jump into the sea*. Maybe we could find a way to keep Bob Dial on the Vestry. *Everybody* loves Bob Dial!

*Susan, do you love Me? Lord, You know that I love You. Tend my sheep.*

Do you know **which** is the *most frequently heard* spiritual command in the Bible? Love God... or your neighbor? Don't steal or murder? Do unto others...? No. It's be not afraid. 'Fear not' or a variant appears 80 times, 27 of those in the New Testament.

I **saw** Bob Dial down in Cabo. I asked how the vestry meeting had gone, grateful that I didn't have to type up the minutes. He said, "You've been elected senior warden."

I get my 'daily bread' from a little book titled God Calling that I found among my mother's things when she passed. Long out of print, it was developed by two British women, fervently faithful, who had been called into some sort of ministry during the war years. These anonymous 'listeners' (as they called themselves) claimed that the words within the pages were given them by the living Christ Himself when the two of them gathered in prayer each evening. The book is

set up as short daily messages that I'm reading now for the 7th year running. I could swear that the words change every year to fit what I need "just then". I've included excerpts from the book that have inspired me this March and April.

Here's God Calling:

*Rise from any fears and go out into the sunlight to meet the risen Lord. Each day will have much in it that must be met. Will you meet it in the spirit of the tomb? Or in the spirit of resurrection?*

*Long though the way may seem, there is not an inch too much. I, your Lord, am not only with you on the journey -- I planned and am planning the journey. There are joys unspeakable in the way you go. Courage, courage, courage.*

To be honest, I'm not afraid to **try** to tend the Lord's flock here. I am afraid that I might fail you. Fail us! The people of this parish are faithful, resilient, and creative. But a transition like the one we've begun will, nonetheless, generate all kinds of very real emotions. We need to hold hands and lock arms and take this journey *together*, as a community. Changes in leadership can be uncomfortable and stressful... but they will go better if we are determined to maintain a positive attitude and focus on how we can live - together - into a new future.

Our first step is letting go of the past, which isn't easy. It may feel like we're losing something important or precious. We may feel adrift and insecure with *no fish in the net*. Or we may feel so hyper about the new possibilities that we 'throw out the baby with the bath water.' A transition isn't about who we were yesterday or are today, though. It's about who we will be tomorrow... for **GC**: *the living presence of our Lord continually transforms a community of his disciples. Union with Jesus is the one great necessity. All else follows naturally. He is the vine, feeding His branches what we need to grow fruit... fruit that will nourish and delight us.*

At the Vestry retreat in February, the Diocese of Olympia's Canon for Congregational Development, Rev. Alissa Newton, met with us for a half-day workshop. She explained the normal life cycles of congregations, and told us that our Bishop and his canons have been planning for our transition for some time now. She reviewed the prescribed process and **surprised** us by saying that the Bishop expects our transition will take at least 2 years, probably closer to 2 and a half! Here is the order of events and breakdown of that time, as he foresees it:

**First**, 6 months work on reconciliation. There it is, the elephant that has been roaming in the Sanctuary and Campbell Hall for 5 years now. No more avoiding it. No more pointing at it from different perspectives. No more arguing about who let it in or who's feeding it or how we can hide it or cage it. But, be not afraid! Keep telling yourself! The Bishop commands us to deal with our wounds and be reconciled to each other, and that we do this *first*. We are assured, though, that Bishop Greg has people and other resources in mind to help us in this delicate work... and the Vestry is inclined to investigate his recommendations before considering other options 'out there' - such as programs from other churches or more secular sources targeting "conflict management."

**Second**, we will spend about a year discerning and writing our parish profile. This profile will include our history, information about our beautiful Island and campus, our county and church demographics, our outreach programs and presence in the community, our treasured in-house traditions and ministries, and the width and height of our hopes for St. Augustine's, our woods, and our community. This profile will then be used to 'reach out' and tell the greater Episcopal Church that we are searching for a new clergy relationship.

**Third**, we will spend a year or so in the actual search process. Rev. Canon Alyssa Newton touched my heart when she said to the Vestry that "Even now, God is preparing the heart of the one who will come to us" in the fullness of time.

**GC:** *The full time of fruit is not yet, but there is the promise of the blossom. Our lives are FULL of glad promise. Such blessings are -- and are to be ours. Such joys, such wonders!*

You may be thinking, "Whoa, that's a lot!" Fear not! The Bishop has people in mind to aid us on this journey. When he met with the Vestry on St. Patrick's Day, he told us that our job for the immediate was just to "say goodbye well" to Nigel. I believe we did a decent job of that task.

Now we will begin the task of meeting the Bishop's recommendations for an Interim priest. This will be someone with skills and experience in interim work - who will advise and guide us through the 2.5 years just described, while also being someone who will care for us and nurture us in the present.

In the meantime, junior warden MK and I started brainstorming what things might fall short in the time between Nigel leaving and an Interim arriving. Did you know that (as far as we can tell) this is the first time in our church history that both wardens, the treasurer and the clerk are women? There is a very maternal, loving group of officers tending the sheep even now. Do women, in general, approach and prioritize things slightly differently than male leaders? We'll see. Here's what we are doing now.

Determined that we minimize any gap in our **pastoral care of each other**, I asked Isabel Neddow to be co-chair (with Eileen Jackson) of our Caring Ministry. I hope that having a co-chair at both the 8:00 and 10:30 services will help us notice any absences and hear of any needs. Isabel said "yes!" ... but that she isn't

speaking to me any more - Ha! Thank you, Isabel!! We also approved new Policies & Procedures for the Caring Ministry which enable the Vestry to help with possible costs incurred by visiting parishioners who are shut in or needing care away from their homes.

Our junior warden is taking on the leaky doors, ruined floors, and the birds nesting in the sacristy cupboard, while I'll be straightening up the crowding in the Fireside Room, cleaning the rector's robing room and office, addressing inadequate office furniture and furnishings, and scheduling *supply clergy*.

Adult Formation programming, beyond Ted's excellent Forum, is something else we have been missing. Thus I asked Teresa DiBiase to return to this ministry - which she will - with the help of hubby Frank Shirbroun. We are doubly blessed!

Oh! and the Vestry will be writing your birthday cards, and such. Now there's something to look forward to; Ha! Please DO TELL ME or MK of anything else that we should be doing in the (hopefully) brief time before our Interim priest is selected. We *want* to tend the needs. I have *promised* my Lord that I will, with God's help.

*St. Augustine's, do you love Me?* Lord, You know that we love You.

*Feed my sheep.*

*GC:*

*You told Me this is My home. I shall use it. Remember this. Such light, such joy flows out of this house! It affects all who come here. Welcome all who come, for I love them as I love you. Be gentle with all. Try to see the heart that I see, to know the pain and difficulty of the other life, that I know. Do not feel you have to try to help them, necessarily. Just love them, welcome them, shower little courtesies on them and they will be helped. Love is God. Give them love, and you give them*

*God. Send no one away without a word of cheer, a feeling that you care. I may have put the impulse to come here into some despairing heart. Would you fail me?*

We ARE eager to be a beacon of welcome and inclusion, joy and community for all on Whidbey Island. We're full of energy and adaptable to new things, and generous with our gifts. This is our truth; let's live into it authentically - unafraid of what changes will come. Our faith will guide us through this transition journey at St. A's. Be not afraid.

It will be a journey for an *uncertain period of time* to bring a *change we can't yet describe*. Aaaarrrrrgghhh! That's like a zombie nightmare for a bunch of Episcopalians! We like things done a certain way and want to know exactly who's doing what and precisely when they'll be done. But, what's new *isn't* here yet, and we *don't* know how long it will take. Aaarrggghhh! But before we serve antacids at coffee hour, let's talk about what we can do to get us through this time.

Our transition should not be a passive time when all we do is pray to God to send us a great new rector – although God does answer *knee-mail*! Transition needs to be an active time when we are all engaged in getting ready for the new thing God is doing in our life together. We - here - today - **are** the church, and our purpose goes on. It's essential that we work together and use this time to keep our ministries flourishing and to continue our good works. **GC:**

*We must walk with the Lord the way to our new freedom...with the Spirit as our life's breath. No worry, no anxiety, but NOT no work.* The Gospel reading said:

*Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It*

*is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish...*

Notice that Jesus didn't just have the fish jump into the boat with no effort on the disciples' part. He sent them out to do the work in the place he commanded. One can't miss the transformation of the followers' work when they recognize, hear and obey the Lord. It echoes the story of when "something like scales" fell from Saul's eyes and he could finally see with the eyes of the Lord, radically converting his work from fruitless to divine.

*GC: It is not to quiet resignation I give my blessings, but to joyful acceptance and anticipation. Try in all things to be very glad, very happy, very thankful.*

*Love and laugh. Make our world the happier for your being in it. Love and rejoice even on the grey days. There are wilderness days for My disciples as well as Mountains of Transfiguration. On both it is duty, persistence and faith that tell.*

Do not fear changes for the Lord is beside us - and He changes not. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever. If we dwell in Him, we, too, will be steadfast... unchanging in joy, calm and compassion.

*GC:*

*I lay My loving hands on you in blessing. Wait in Love and longing to feel their tender pressure and, as you wait, courage and hope will flow into your being, irradiating all your lives with the warm sun of my Presence. Let all go this Eastertide. Loosen your hold on earth, its care, its worries, even its joys. So often, one crying out for some blessing, has yet such tight hold on some earth-treasure that he has no hand to receive Mine as I hold it out in love.*



I *know* Jesus stands beside us every step of the way. Be not afraid!  
As the psalm says, He will *turn our wailing into dancing; he will put off our old wraps and clothe us with joy.*

From the Revelation of John:

*Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne - and to the Lamb- be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" And the ... living creatures said, "Amen!"*