

Acts 16:9-15

□ Psalm 67 □

Revelation 21:10, 22-22

John 14:23-29

Episcopal Church since 1853

The Rev. Dr. Anita Schell-Lambert

Sunday, May 9, 2010

Easter 6: Rogation Sunday

Emmanuel Church, Newport, RI, an

“The Grace of new beginnings,” The Long Good Bye and the gifts left behind to begin a new chapter

We are a dynamic faith community committed to sharing God's love. Our mission is to equip people to live as disciples of Jesus.

First, let me say how entirely THRILLED I am to be with you as your 18th rector. It feels so good and right for that and me to embark with you in this next chapter of your wonderful history at this moment in time. Together, rector, wardens, Vestry, congregation and staff, we are at a moment in time, and it is our great joy to embrace this moment together.

I am deeply grateful to the Profile Committee, the Search Committee and the Vestry for this affirmation of my calling, and to all of you who have contributed in so many ways to my welcome, including the marvelous “Faces of Emmanuel” that Ellen Vadney generously put together. I’ll say much, much more about all of these things in the days, weeks, months and years to come. For now I want to hear from you, to listen and learn from you.

I have listened to your comments and who would like you to guess the two main themes from the “Faces of Emmanuel.” And discovered two key themes. 1. What is your greatest hope? TO GROW THE CONGREGATION FROM THE CHRONOLOGICALLY YOUNGEST – children and youth – on up. Over 95 % of you spoke about children and youth. A number of you voiced concern about attracting more men to Emmanuel. In particular, one of you wrote very movingly that your hope is that “(and I am quoting here), that Emmanuel can once again become the vibrant diverse congregation that attracted and kept us.”

And 2. WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST FEAR? Everyone who responded to this question talked about \$, that we won’t have the \$

or people to do just that? I was moved that two of you said that you have no fears and do not worry – you are right up there with Jesus in that regard! Would that we could all follow you, because worry and fear immobilize us – that get us stuck. Let us follow the 2 parishioners who responded to the fear question and not have any fears.

So, let's get going together - listening, learning, loving, leading into a bold new future on this Mother's Day and Rogation Sunday 2010. Allen Hill has done a marvelous job describing Rogation Sunday for you in the Music Notes; I'm going to focus on the Gospel for today. Now, I warned some of my new younger friends last week, that I would be giving a quiz towards the end of my first sermon, so I hope you were listening to the Gospel because the answers to the question are in it. Here's the question which you can ponder or even look up while I tell you about the gifts my parents left me when they died a year ago....

YOUR question is – what two, or even three, depending on how you read today's Gospel, gifts does Jesus leave behind for his disciples that will equip them for ministry? If we are a “dynamic faith community committed to sharing God's love” then we will need these gifts...so let me tell you about the gifts my parents left me when they died a year ago with a backdrop to today's Gospel.

How many of you have noticed how when you are saying goodbye to certain friends or relatives (this most often happened with my mother) it took forever to say goodbye. It seemed like hours that you had placed your hand on the doorknob until you actually drove or walked away. Anyone experience that phenomena? Well, if you have, then you are in very good company, because Jesus takes chapters to say goodbye to his 12 best friends, called disciples, gathered around the table, that we now call the Last Supper. Scholars call these middle chapters of John's Gospel the “Farewell Discourse,” I call them the “long goodbye,” and truth be told, it takes me forever to get out the door – you'll see – at least half an hour from the time I say I am leaving until I actually leave. I don't know exactly why this is true,

but it is. It took Jesus chapters, so I guess I'm in good company with my long goodbyes.

Goodbyes are very important, as you experienced three weeks ago when you said goodbye to Rev Stephanie as your interim rector and last week to Deacon Ann as your deacon. You celebrated their life and ministry with you while acknowledging that it was the end of their ministry as interim rector and deacon among you. They will begin new chapters, just as my congregation in Bennington, Vermont will begin a new chapter as they prepare for their next rector, and I am now beginning a new chapter in my ministry this day with you.

When my parents died last year, both of them took a long time to make their final goodbye. My mother had been ill since I was 16 and I'm 53 now. That was a very long time to be sick and her last 5 years she was very ill. My dear sweet mother taught me so many things about saying goodbye gracefully and lovingly, so much so that at her funeral, I preached that the BEST WAY to remember our mother was to take all the love she had given us and give that to one another, especially to those with whom we had disagreements. (This sometimes happens when people die – family members get scrappy) Her last gift to us was that unconditional love.

At my father's funeral I recalled how my father used to say to me, "Anita, for us there are no goodbyes." He first said this when I went off to college.

Until I was 18 years old I had spent all my life in Lancaster, PA, which was a great place to grow up surrounded by gorgeous farms and rolling landscapes. I loved it, and was a bit nervous when FOR the first time I left Lancaster to go off to college in the far away state of Rhode Island! As I was waving goodbye to my parents from my freshman dorm, my father uttered those words that I would hear until his dying day, "Anita, for us there are no goodbyes." And I believe that, when you really love someone, REALLY love someone, there are no goodbyes, not even death takes that person away from you – this is true for pets as well.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE – In the Greek of the New Testament it's called, AGAPE Love – I would die for you love – parents know all about this And NO GOODBYES, are the gifts my parents left behind, and the key themes in today's Gospel, part of Jesus' long goodbye to his twelve best friends.

And now, did you figure out what Jesus leaves behind? He leaves behind his peace and the Holy Spirit, so that we, his followers, his disciples, in the words of your mission statement will be “equipped to live as disciples of Jesus.” Very cool. And here, and in other parts of this long goodbye in John's Gospel and other Gospels as well, he leaves his unconditional love.

Let's conclude by exploring what these three gifts mean to us today – love, peace and the Holy Spirit. Anyone want to offer some description of these three gifts? What do they cost? Both everything and nothing – no monetary value, for they are priceless, and you can't buy them in a store. All three of them get better with usage and age. Love - this is not a wimpy, “I love that new dress love. It's agape – I would DIE for you love, the love parents have for their children, the love that always says – YOU are more important than I am; I'll take care of you first, the love Jesus lived every day of his life. Peace –again not a wimpy, “let's not fight kind of peace.” This peace, SHALOM in the Aramaic of Jesus' day, is the deep peace of the flowing water and earth from creation. It's in the DNA of Jesus, and it's really in our DNA as well - the desire to always seek reconciliation and forgiveness, to go the extra mile to understand. Read the prayer attributed to St. Francis (found at the top of page 833 in *The Book of Common Prayer*, prayer #62) for a fuller description of this peace, which the world cannot give, but God gives, as we always strive to understand and love one another.

And thirdly, the Holy Spirit, which comes from God, the Advocate, the Comforter, literally the One called to the side of Jesus, that will work with these disciples to equip them for ministry so that they, according to Jesus a chapter later, will do even greater things than Jesus did – because of the Holy Spirit.

3 vital gifts that Jesus gives his disciples and that equip us as well in our new season of ministry this Mother's Day and every day, LOVE, PEACE and the HOLY SPIRIT.

Thank you for calling me in this thrilling adventure “to be a dynamic faith community committed to sharing God’s love.” Thank you for being patient with me as I learn your names and traditions, your rituals, habits and customs. Thank you for your mission to serve others in the world, equipping yourselves with the best gifts of all – love, peace and the Holy Spirit this day and for the rest of our lives. I feel so welcomed to Emmanuel, Newport. Glory, glory glory be to God “for the grace of new beginnings placed before us in every moment and encounter of life.”¹ AMEN

¹ J. Philip Newell, *Celtic Benediction: Morning and Night Prayer*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000, 65.