

2024-09-21 Last Sermon at CVLC John 21:15-17

By The Reverend Cheryl Kester-Schmidt

Let us take a whirlwind tour of our life together. My installation was beautiful. The church was full and we made promises before God. Pastor and people together is like being married. We fell in love a few months later. Today, we will also make promises but love will remain forever.

In 2018, I returned from vacation to find it was Pastor appreciation Sunday and you planned a surprise. I was having none of it. Caren Adamson finally said, "We are giving you the day off. Johnene is preaching – my reply – "No way, I have a really spicy sermon about David and Bathsheba." I have never preached that sermon but what a great day! You gave me a beautiful quilt with your names on it. I cherish it.

Tuesday Morning Bible Study evolved into reading the entire Bible. We studied each chapter we read and have a better understanding of God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. However, I

always marveled that while I was on vacation the group could barrel through 8 chapters and when I led we might be lucky to get through 4. You opened my eyes to new ways to see God.

Advent and Lenten services with Marty Haugen's Holden Service and Harold leading Hymn Sing before the service. Choir practice, Sunday Anthems and Laurel making the organ sing. There was instrumental music and Larry, Jacque and Deloris blessed us with solos. LaPaz played for the 2nd service - and that was the service that saw 54 new disciples join.

Holy week saw the Three Days with Easter Vigil bringing your theatrical talent to light. Those who told the Bible stories brought them to light. There were little productions as Sermon when we used the Narrative Lectionary. I found three camels made twenty-five years before in the attic and we did an Epiphany drama about the Three Wisemen. Who could forget - Duane in his flowerpot hat as one of the three kings.

I also remember the 30-minute hot discussion about a comma, a colon or a semi-colon while updating the Constitution.

We went through Harvey and a number of hurricane scares and tropical storms. We and Victoria came together and it was fantastic.

I introduced you to Superbowl Sunday and you got into it. VCAM benefited as you brought food for your team to determine the Superbowl winner. We had a coin toss, a bulletin that put us in the game and generally had fun.

A few of us began studying the Jesus healing miracles. We became members of the Order of St. Luke and started the Healing Grace chapter of OSL. We prayed for one another and others. We had healing services and you came to be prayed for. Out of that grew our Blue Christmas service. We were exceeding all expectations and ministry was thriving and along came

You take the ELCA's God's Work. Our hands. Slogan seriously. You are God's hands and feet for Easter Outreach,

Trunk or Treat, VCAM, Christ's Kitchen, Perpetual Help Home, and Promise Pointe. We helped single moms, the homeless, and more. The Synod and the wider church have benefited through our giving to Lutheran Disaster Relief and World Hunger.

In 2019, we began work of a separate sacristy for the preparation of holy communion and the sacred space in the sanctuary. In the process the Narthex was updated and made more welcoming. The parking lot was repaved and our cars each sent up a prayer of thanks be to God.

We were introduced to Joanne's mother and pastor father, Doris and John Wanamaker. They came from Ohio, stay for a month or so and give us their presence. Doris and I spoke of the Chrismon's and a group was pulled together to refurbish and create new ones. The tree was glorious but on the horizon loomed COVID.

March 16, 2020, everything changed. changed. We shut down with no end in sight. Jan and I spent the rest of the week

preparing to vacate the office and work from home. The good news was our five-year plan became the 3-day plan and we had worship on that Sunday via recording. Larry was building the plane as we flew week to week. God sent him a new friend who helped ease Larry through those rough months. We give thanks to God for Larry's tenacity and willingness to learn new things. And to that dedicated computer expert whom we will never meet. God works in mysterious ways.

During COVID the Sacristy and Narthex were finished, a sound booth was built, we did Drive-thru Communion, worship in the play yard, worship in the fellowship hall along with live streaming, and finally back to the sanctuary. We confirmed Brayden, Madison, Joley and Callea in the midst of it all. We went to one service and found we have as many watching online as we do in the sanctuary. God is awesome!

The Christ the Victor annex at Morada sees LaPaz delivering the word as a number of our members are residents. I give God

all the glory for being able to worship with such talented musicians and choir members.

You are excellent pray-ers and have prayed many of us through difficult challenges. I give thanks to God for your prayers as I mourned the death of my son, Matt, two knee surgeries and the death of my cat companion, Blaze.

We have laughed, cried, rejoiced for newborns, mourned our dead and welcomed new sheep to the flock. God is good all the time.

You will continue your good work as you move into the future. One of the greatest accomplishments occurred when we worked with God to affirm congregation daughter, Johnene's call to be a pastor. You supported her with prayer and monies as she discerned. You have cause to be proud. You have come full circle and I know God has good things in store for you. I give thanks to God that you saw and see something in me that I do not see in myself. I still ask God, "What are you thinking?"

Our text today, is usually preach by someone else. It is my ordination, my installation, my Farewell Service scripture. It is a story of restoration.

It is two weeks since Peter denied Jesus three times around a charcoal fire on the night He was arrested. Awesome things happened - Jesus died, was buried, resurrected and appeared to many including the disciples. The disciples were instructed to go to Galilee and wait. They did not listen and scattered to their homes and familiar things.

Peter, a man of action, did not a sit he went fishing and the others joined him. They put out in the boat and fished all night but caught nothing.

Jesus appears on shore and tells them to throw the nets our again. When caught more fish imagined. John recognized Jesus on shore and Peter jumps into the sea and swims to shore. He wants to be with Jesus.

They find Jesus cooking breakfast on a charcoal fire. Breakfast and the large catch were evidence Jesus would provide for His disciples. The same is true for us. Jesus wants us to seek first His kingdom and righteousness. He promises to meet our needs.

The important point – Jesus and Peter have unfinished business – Peter’s boasting and denial around a charcoal fire on the night Jesus was arrested lay between them.

Jesus calls Peter “Simon.” Perhaps to call attention to his backsliding into his old way of life. Jesus’ first question challenges Peter’s loyalty. At the last Supper, Peter boasted he was more committed to Jesus than the others, he would not fall away. Jesus’ question exposed Peter’s heart. *“Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?”*

Jesus refers to agape love - a love of commitment and sacrifice. The love God has for us through Jesus’ sacrifice on the

cross for our sins. The love God commands us to have for others. Jesus is asking Peter how deep is your love for me.

Peter's gives a strong affirmative "Yes, Lord." Peter is humbled. He had not been obedient to Jesus. He bragged and denied Jesus prophecy concerning him. He was not willing to risk his life for Jesus.

Jesus' reply commands Peter to take care of the most vulnerable of His sheep. Peter is to teach new believers to be followers of Jesus.

Jesus' second question is direct - "*Simon, son of John do you love Me?*" Peter gives the same answer. "*Yes, Lord: You know that I love You.*" Peter uses the word for brotherly love. Peter affirms he has strong affection for Jesus.

Jesus commands Peter to "*Shepherd My sheep.*" - which means the total care of the flock, not just the feeding. Peter is entrusted with the spiritual teaching and care of all His followers.

Jesus significantly changes His third question. "*Simon, son of John, do you love Me?*" He uses Peter's word for love and Peter is grieved. This last question challenges the brotherly love Peter claims to have for Jesus. Peter appeals to Jesus and says, "*You know all things.*"- You know me Lord, you know what I am claiming is true.

Jesus' third command affirms Peter's responsibilities for Jesus' flock. "*Tend My Sheep.*" Peter had failed, Christ restores him to his former stature. This conversation was in the presence of the other disciples, so there is no doubt Jesus will use them despite past transgressions.

My sisters and brothers, we like Peter fail the Lord in our lives. We, the beloved children of God have sin problems. Jesus restored Peter and used him. The Good news of Jesus Christ is He can do the same for us. Thanks be to God!