

Sermon Psalm 27 Matthew 4: 12-25 January 27, 2008

Look Where We're Going - See Who We're Following

Shawl Ministry - this morning we want to take a moment to honor the second anniversary of the Shawl Ministry which began two years ago this month under the sponsorship of the Board of Deacons and the guidance of my wife Mary. Over the past two years over 40 women have been actively involved in this prayer focused ministry of care and compassion, over 140 people have had shawls knitted for them and delivered with prayer to them, and a number of people who do not knit have contributed to support this ministry. Each first and third Monday of the month the knitters who are able meet at the Church for fellowship, prayer, and knitting, and to bless each finished shawl - to - in effect bathe each shawl in prayer. This morning we invite you to again share in this ministry as we bless this shawl as a congregation, and symbolically the ongoing work of the Pray Shawl program.

There is a colorful display of the shawl ministry in Heritage Hall and Mary will be there to answer any questions.

Will join please join me now in the prayer printed in the bulletin used to bless each shawl. Thank you.

Sermon

Savior like a shepherd lead us, much we need thy tender care.

In thy pleasant pastures lead us, for our use thy fold prepare...

Almost - almost - that was the prayer - the theme song - of Colin and Caroline Campbell - when they envisioned a church, a chapel, on this north shore of Orchard Lake some 140 years ago.... *Savior like a shepherd lead us, for our use thy fold prepare...*

And - through many toils, dangers and snares, including the economic collapse of 1871, which cost Colin Campbell his business, and led to the famous story, or tale, of Caroline Campbell and her grapes - Through challenging times - a fold was prepared for us - the chapel was built. And ever since, for all these years, the wise Scotsman Peter Dow's conditional gift of the Church property has been met. We've worshipped God here each year.

In 1871 the Campbells knew where they wanted to go - to take a budding Christian fellowship out of their living room on Apple Island, and into a chapel on the lake shore.

In many ways we face a similar challenge and opportunity - some 136 years later. The living room worked for the Campbells for many years. Yet Caroline saw the possibility of a wider reaching ministry. For 30 some years, our current buildings have worked for us and our mission - But now - as then - both necessity and new possibilities have called us forward in faith - building to share - to spread wider our ministry for Christ. And - as even then, so now, change and its challenge tested and tests our faith.

It is at such a time as this, a time of change and challenge and possibilities, that I am encouraged, strengthened in my faith and hope... by the faith and hope I find in God's word, and in particular in the words of the psalmist... read by Marjorie his morning And the by faithful response to Christ's call by those first disciples recorded in Matthew.

In our day - the economy is in trouble, deep trouble here in Michigan, making it harder for businesses, for charities, and for churches, as our annual report will show - harder to meet budgets, or grow new programs or reach and serve new people well.

But precisely in such times, it is wonderfully good to hear the voice of faith ring down the years - *The Lord is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear? I believe I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

And what a challenge to me, to us, to our faith - to hear again Christ's call to be his Disciples - to cast our lot, our hope, our trust with him. Simply – to follow his lead.

Yes - in this new year - let's look where we're going - Let's see who we're following. Please pray with me.

Lord, may the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your loving and faithful people, be acceptable in your sight, and your good word to us this day in Christ. Amen.

Leslie Brandt translates the lines from the 27th psalm in these words....

With the loving and eternal God is my goal and guide, fear and anxiety preempt no place in my life. It is possible to know and experience God's love in this uncertain, tumultuous existence. Take courage, step out in faith, scorning consequences. Let God have His way with you. Let God have His way with you.

Yes,, Yes ... I guess that's the title I'd rather I had chosen for the message this morning. It's what the psalmist said. It's what the earliest disciples did when they heard Christ's call.

A black Baptist Church in Kansas City put its faith and mission statement this way - a way that makes it clear where its seeking to go and who its following. Wake up, Sing up, Preach up, Pray up, Stay up, Pay up, but never Give up, or Back up, or Shut up until the cause of Christ in the Church and in the world is Built up. Yes....

And isn't that where we're going - after God and God's will for us. Because that's who we're following, the Son of God? I was spinning the dial - Okay - couch potato wise - I was punching the remote last Night - watching different reports on the remarkable presidential primary vote in South Carolina and I stopped briefly to listen to a grade school choir singing the African song that we've sung here - We are marching in the Light of God. Marching, Marching, Marching in the Light of God.

And - listening to that music, and those words, sung by a public school class - Can you believe - a number of thoughts clicked in my mind. The vision and faith of the psalmist we read this morning, seeing God's work in the World for our good.. the surprising showing of Barack Obama in the Democratic Primary races ; (is it a sign of hope for a new hue in politics beyond red vs. Blue?); our own Church history and the challenges we face in the coming years, and the power of God's call in Christ to God's people to be about God's business...

All this kept going around in my head....

No question there are and will be challenging times for us as a Church - for you as Christ's people gathered here in worship and fellowship and service. We live in rapidly changing times .

And - in the midst of a building to share campaign, in the mess of re-construction literally - in our building - And knowing there will be a major change in leadership very soon... And in a time when the area is not growing and we are not growing either... It helps me, and it should, I pray, help you, too.. to hear the message of God's word to us this morning. Let God have God's Way with us. Let God have God's way with us...

Because - The Lord is our light and our salvation - And it is God, by the working of God's Spirit in our world and in our own lives, who has called us here. This time in our lives, in the life of our Church.... Is God's time. It's why you're here. You've been drawn here.

Some history in your family.... Some nudge from a neighbor or friend.... Some convenience of location or sight of the scene - this white church on the lake.. Some special event - a marriage, a child's birth.... Things like this drew you into Church.... Some unusual connection - between God's spirit alive in you and in this Body of Christ. Some inner longing of soul and spirit....

That's been the call - Not as clear or quite as life changing as the call that Peter and Andrew and James and John heard.... On the shore of a different lake.....

But you heard it... and you hear it still... In your own search for a way to let God have God's way with you. We hear the call - You and I prove again the truth of St. Augustine's observation - that our human hearts are restless, will be restless, until they find their rest in God. Until - we let God have God's way with us...

The pull is there isn't it? It's part of why you come... It's part of what you hope to hear here - in some clearer way - if not each Sunday - some Sunday. In something sung, or read, or preached - or heard in the inner most part of your being - in prayer. What God's way is for you. What strength you can find here. What answers to some of the deeply troubling questions in life - the reason or meaning of disease, and suffering, and death? - the persistence of sin, in us, and in the world; Kwami - didn't you read about David and Bathsheba?

The cost of sin in the lives of people who are victims of prejudice, and pogroms, and war.

The pull is there - and the prayers are our prayers - for guidance through the troubling situations and circumstances in life. And the hope is there - that here – together - we can help each other push on and push through - in finding - if not answers - who can know the mind of God? -

The pull is there - that we can find ways to live in and through the mysteries of life with faith, with courage and trust, with some comfort and real hope, and with love and care for each other - and every other person out there there. That we can strengthen one another and help one another let God have God's way with us..

It has long been the heart beat of this Church's life. A deep common caring - For God's word to us in Christ, and for each other, and for the community.

And I suspect - even as we provide - by God's grace and our good giving... A safer more inviting fold for us to use.... A Faith Enrichment Center - What we most need to be as a church is a better megaphone for this community so that more of us and our neighbors can hear more clearly God's call in Christ.

Unless we share what we know about God having God's way with us – calling us to the best way of living there is – in Christ....unless we share this, our knowing this for ourselves will Not draw us closer to being the people we are called to be in Christ, or living the lives we need to live as children of God.

Be clear - I am deeply grateful for the mission heart and commitment of this Church - for all you give in time and money to reach out in love for others - opening this place to South Oakland Shelter; or helping to aid and comfort and encourage youngsters with HIV in Honduras, or bringing the gospel of God's love in Christ to teens in Moscow, outcast families in India, and untouched peoples in Mexico.

But the challenge before us, before you as you move into a new time in your life as a community of faith in the year ahead, is to make it more of a mission to reach the unchurched in every one of our neighborhoods. There are people whose hunger for God is as real as ours, And they simply need to know where that hunger can be fed.

Maybe THEE GALA - fund raiser that it will be - will be still one way to say more clearly in our community WHO we are.. and WHY we are.

That - here - we can hear - how we can let God have God's way with us... How we can know how to let our restless hearts find their rest, and so their comfort, their courage and hope - in God.

It is our call - to let others know - where it is we are going - in these Challenging Times - God's way. And to take comfort and confidence and courage in knowing who it is we are following...

And I suspect we all could be clearer about God's call to us and mission for us - if we spent more time, not less, in godly pursuits the Lenten Season just ahead will offer. How good a time to let ourselves become more open to God's presence and God's leading -

In Worship - with preaching centered on the fruits our faith can bear in our lives...

In Study - in the wonder and power of God's word to us in the music of the Messiah,
Or in the steps of a spiritual journey

In Devotion - in prayer and sacrament every Weds. Morning and at Noon. Or in the practice for 40 days of daily scripture reading....

In Dedication - through the sacrificial One Great Hour of Sharing offering that brings immediate Christian care to victims of disasters

Ways - just suggested possible ways - for each of us to let God have more of God's way with us. To let us - one by one - and as a Church - grow deeper and wider in our sense of the presence of God in our lives, and through our lives, in God's world.

Ways - for us - yes - to Wake up, Sing up, Preach up, Pray up, Stay up, Pay up, but never Give up, or Back up or Shut up until the cause of Christ in the Church and in this world is Built up. Ways for us to answer Christ's call to this group of people on the shore of this Lake - no less than those who heard him call long ago... and changed the world.

I heard him call. That was all. My worldly gold grew dim. I followed him. Who would not answer if they heard him call.

As we mark another annual meeting – another year of ministry and mission as Christ's people in this place.... Yes - lets Look and see where we're going - and See who we are following...

He is the way and the truth and life ... for us .. and the world. Amen...

David W. Robertson, Pastor

ANNUAL MEETING 2007
PASTOR'S REPORT

1. Let me begin by expressing by grateful thanks to you for the kind of people and the kind of Church you are – and – thank God – are still trying to be. What a privilege it has been for me to serve as your pastor now through 12 plus years. And I am more in awe of what do as a congregation ... each year.

2. What a year of faithful ministry and mission you accomplished in 2007 - In a very challenging year for Michigan and SE Michigan economy – you have been true to the history of this Church – you have done remarkable things in rough times. It is perhaps good to remember that this Church was established and the first building was built in the midst of the great depression of the early 1870's – when Mr. Campbell lost all of his holdings – except Apple Island.

In a tough year you again gave generously - not only to the budgeted ministry and mission of the Church - but nearly as much to the Building Fund...

Did we dip a bit in budget giving - and with computer correction and moves - also in membership - yes --- but a strong year in a very weak economy.

And you supported mission outreach to our community, and, special mission trips - to the Gulf Coast, to Mexico, and our Youth to W. Virginia

And thank you for the strong response to the call for help with the youth program and the youth search committee... a task very well done in finding Scott Hobart, off this morning with the Senior Highs on a spiritual retreat.

And last year you appointed a CoPastor Nominating Committee already hard at work to make for as smooth as possible transition our your leadership.

And I was again privileged to work with a wonderfully talented and deeply dedicated group of people... What a blessing for me to be able to be in ministry with you with the people you've called here –

Marjorie continues to grow our CE program, to preach with power and imagination and to serve you with great love. Linda loves the little children and – everyone else as a beloved children of God – and she, with all the volunteers she recruits and trains, provides us with a Christian Education program marked by innovation, excitement and excellence.

And Bruce, and Margaret – and our music leadership team., including this program year Don Lucking and Kirsten Snyder – have continued the strong music ministry - and – they could do even more – if more of you would consider using your gifts in this way. What joy it brings.

I really don't have to say much about Chris our Faith Community Nurse - because so many of you have availed yourselves of her counsel and advise, or have experienced her care. What a right and left arm of support and extension of our ministry Chris is to Marjorie and myself.

And - though we have missed Anne Schaefer's presence in worship and preaching, these past two years - and now know she will continue in Interim Ministry, how blessed we are for her continued availability for counseling and pastoral ministry.

We are blessed with a great staff.... Connie and Kelly, and Betty and Joanne and Doug adding their special gifts.....

And – this year – I have been blessed again – as I have for now 40 +years in ministry, with the steady and strong and faithful support of my wife Mary.... Organizing me as best she can, putting up with my schedule, singing, and sitting exposed each Sunday as I preach well or not so well, she is a rock of support for me... And this year – she has again led a remarkable new ministry – the shawl ministry - that has touched the lives of over 40 knitters and now nearly 150 people.

What a blessing for me that so many people – staff and a great group of 44 officers, and a faithful membership - keep the ministry of Orchard Lake Community Church, Presbyterian - alive and well - make it possible for this Church to care deeply for Christ, and for the Church and for the community. And – this year – we pray - also help us move into the Faith Enrichment Center and use our new facilities in order to Share more effectively and widely - the great good news of our faith....

As I shared with you last year – as part of the Master Plan Campaign - with the consent of the officers, and of you, the members of this Church – to whom I am responsible - it is the plan that I would time my retirement in a way that will best insure the smoothest transition in Pastoral Leadership, and the most successful completion of the current Building to Share Campaign. While exact dates will depend on a number of factors - we hope all of this will be accomplished by mid 2009. Sooner or later than that date, as best serves this Church, my retirement will take place.

And then I will simply cheer you on in your continued caring ministry for Christ. For now – I look forward to a challenging and exciting year as we do much together for the Kingdom of God in this place.

Order of the Annual Meeting...