

Sermon 11 9 & 10 19

Now before I get all involved in my sermon, I want to thank Deacon Carl for preaching the last two Sundays and for leading worship while I was off in Chicago meeting our two new grandchildren, Francis and Isabella. Their picture is taped to the window of my office if you want to see them.

And many thanks to Carl and to *all of you* for everything you have done to start off our stewardship campaign so beautifully.

**And now, presenting, my sermon. And I have to ask, what is it with this Gospel? First, we have these Sadducees, trying to trip up Jesus. Someone was always trying to trip him up. So here are these Sadducees, an exclusive sect of wealthy priests and aristocrats that hung around for only about two hundred years, and they're telling this story, sort of a parable really, about this poor woman who ends up having to marry *seven* brothers, one after the other, to try to provide a child for at least one of them. But each of them died and then she finally did too — probably with relief! And these Sadducees are asking, 'In the Resurrection, (which they don't believe in anyway, by the way...) whose wife would she be?'
What?!?**

Every week, I get together with a few other priests from our convocation for a Bible study to talk about the readings we're going to be preaching on. Now these are all, except for one great female

priest, very nice young men. They're great too! They've all been to seminary. They're very smart. They're very articulate. They didn't see anything at all odd about this parable from the Sadducees. Well, I did! Why should this poor woman, after having suffered through SEVEN husbands, be stuck with *any* of them for ETERNITY!?!

Surely there's another option... And, of course, Jesus pointed it out. Those of us who are going to be resurrected don't need to worry about things like marriage in heaven. We can assume that heaven will have different rules. Jesus said we will all be like angels - children of God - children of the resurrection. Jesus said that as far as God is concerned, we will always be alive with God - ageless. And whatever the social order is in heaven, none of that matters because we will be with God and we will be alive - forever - TADA!

All of our readings and our psalm come down to the glorious claims of our collect. We are the children of God and as the children of God, we will inherit eternal life.

BUT, until then, God has given us work to do. And part of that work is to live our lives as best we can. And a great part of our lives, the greater part of our lives here together is our church and what our church means to us.

But what is a church? Is it a building? Is it our beautiful windows? As lovely as these things are... And as much as we treasure them - windows and bricks do not make a church. If some

horrible thing happened tomorrow and our beautiful building was destroyed, would there still be The Church of the Good Shepherd?

Yes! Of course there would be! Because even more than the brick and mortar, even more than the glass and the organ, even more than our glorious history... More than all that is YOU - YOU ARE THE CHURCH. You are the Church's past, present, and future. Church of the Good Shepherd is YOU.

Here's the Church. Here's the Steeple. Open the doors and see all the PEOPLE. (I did the children's poem with my hands and fingers.) Take away everything else. All of it. And there would still be the Church of the Good Shepherd. Because YOU are the Church. You are the Sunday School. You are the breakfasts. You are the Adult Forum. You are the dinners. You are the Holly Fair. You are the Choir. You are the Food Bank. You are the painters and the cleaners and the teachers. You are the care we give our children. You are the joy of our Cantatas. You are the child who is learning to play the organ. You are the young man or woman who is applying for a scholarship to help with college. You are the woman who has been attending for years and is coming to the end of her days, but who still receives the Eucharist faithfully, to whom it still means so much. For whom it's so important.

You are the child who sings, feet riveted to the floor, eyes staring straight ahead in flat out fear, but she still sings. You are the

baby who is baptized and received into the Household of God. You are the ladies who polish the silver and wash and iron the linens and fill the candles. You are the men who paint and repair the building, who chart all of the electrical outlets and switches. You sign up to pay for flowers. You mow the lawn and tend the flower beds. You sign up to teach our children. You sign up to bring goodies for Coffee Hour and then you serve them. (Hear anything you might want to help with here?) You lead worship. You lead classes. You lift your voice in song. You have ideas. You worship and pray. You are the Church.

None of this happens without you. Everyone, every single one of you has something to offer, something to give to *your* church. You are, each of you, essential - more valuable than you can ever know. And your value increases exponentially because you are infinitely more valuable together. We are greater than the simple sum of our parts.

And if you, we, are the Church, well, we have to take care of ourselves. We have to be responsible for ourselves. I am so proud to be your priest. You folks step up. When Brad and I moved here, we were and still are impressed with your hands-on ownership of your church. Sure, sometimes it's hard to collaborate, to cooperate. Not everybody gets along, but everybody can respect each other. Everybody can show kindness to each other. Everybody can extend

the hand of God to each other. And then to the world. That is our mission. That is the mission God has given us to do.

So every Fall we, your clergy and your Vestry come to you and ask you to share yourselves, your time, your God-given talents and skills, and your treasure. Yes, because we believe in what we're doing here on Highland Terrace and Wildwood Avenue in Pitman NJ. We are asking you to part with some of, a percentage of, your hard-earned money. And we ask for your money because we believe that together we are doing God's work in the world. Your church needs your support. And your church is a good investment.

Just as Job said, we say, "I know that my Redeemer lives," we know that Jesus lives in us and through us. And at the end of all time, we know he will stand on the earth, and even though we may no longer possess our bodies as we know them now, we believe that in our flesh, we shall see God. And God will always be with us, on our side, and our eyes will see him. And all this will happen because God loves us. We each can say, "God loves me."

So now it's time to do our homework, the homework Deacon Carl gave to us.

Let us pray. God of grace and glory, please be with us. Please be with our beloved Church of the Good Shepherd during this time when we celebrate stewardship, when we celebrate our ability to give back to you. Help us to be good stewards. Help us to find all the

ways we can give to you. Help us to find more time in our lives to give to you. Help us to explore our talents and share them with you. Help us to give of our treasure, of our own money to do your work in the world. You are everything we need. Help us to be everything you need. We know that we are fallible. We know that we are sinners. We know that we need you beside us to move forward. Tell us, Jesus! What do you want us to do today?