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2EpiphanyC22
Last Sunday
St. Mark's, LaGrange

It is time to offer you a blessing.

My temptation is to offer you a bunch of words.

To try to say everything that needs to be said.

But after eleven years
and 560 sermons

(I looked back, and yes it was 560).

After all of that,

what else needs to be said?

God loves you no matter what.

That much has been said.

Salvation is up to God.

I have been as clear as I can be.

God's love is bigger than we can imagine.

It's been said at least a hundred times.

I either trust myself and,

more to the point,

trust you and God Almighty.

I either trust that you have heard it,

or I do not.

And I do.

I trust you.

Sure, we'll all keep messing it up and forgetting it,
and God will love us anyway.

I thought and I thought,
but I couldn't think of the perfect story about my grandmother.

I can only hope
that you will be on the lookout for that person in your life.
That you will continue to be that person in someone's life.

That person who loves them no matter what.

I can only hope
you remember that God loves you
the way grandmas love you.

And I do.
I trust you to remember that.

Again and again these last weeks,
I've heard people tell me what a blessing I have been to you.

I thank you for that.
I thank you for giving me the chance to be a blessing.

But the truth is,
you have been a blessing to me as well.

You have blessed my time
with laughter and with hope.
You have lifted me up at times I was despondent.
You have reminded me of what is most important.

For all of that,
I thank you.

If you look around my office now,
you'd see blank walls.

Where I once had my ordination certificates
and the pictures of churches I served
and some of my wife's art,
now you see gray walls above the white wainscoting.

It's a blank space.

Maybe it will be the next rector's office,
or maybe as you all consider what to do with the basement space,
it will become something totally different.

Those blank walls have been hard to look at over the last few weeks,
as first my books
and then my art came down and into boxes.

It's interesting to me that I took my books down first,
and then the art.

Writing this sermon is more difficult,
looking at just these gray walls.

The blank walls have been hard to look at,
but they also feel like the right image.

It's a blank space.

Blank spaces are scary and difficult.

You don't know what will go into that blank.
It means trusting God to fill in the blank.
And it means trusting God ...between now and then.

We aren't always so good at trusting God,
but...God loves us anyway.

Paul writes today about spiritual gifts.
Most of us draw a blank
when it comes to our spiritual gifts.

After all,
we aren't always sure what we're good at
and we're even less sure about taking hold of it.

But Paul is clear,
*I do not want you to be uninformed
...there are varieties of gifts,
but the same Spirit.*

Who knows what gifts will fill those blank walls,
who knows what gifts will make their way into the rector's office,
either the one right over there
or wherever it is when the time comes.

But the truth is,
the gifts that will occupy that office
are far less important
than the gifts that each of you possess.

Those gifts will come to the fore over the next months,
gifts you weren't sure you had,
that you never thought you could have.

Which is exactly the same experience I had
over eleven years ago,
sitting down at that desk and thinking,
“Well, now what do I do?”

What I do now,
is bless you.

I thank you.

I give thanks to God for you.

This is not the eloquent,
poetic sermon I wish I could write,
but it could never be that.

There is too much to say,
and poetry is all about editing,

not adding.

So I won't add anything else.

Instead, I will end as I began.

A little more than eleven years ago,
on October 24, 2010,
this is how I ended my very first sermon at St. Mark's.

I wondered what to say today. In my first sermon here.

And it occurs to me that while you probably came curious about me,
about what I might say.

You really came to hear the Good News.

That's why we always come together on Sunday morning.

Because there is Good News to hear.

Good News about resurrection;
Good News about love.

You came because this is your home,

We come together
in the sure and certain hope
that God will be among us,
that God will be in the midst of everything that we are,
redeeming what is lost,
and blessing what is found.

Today, on my last Sunday,
we came together to say goodbye.
We came together to offer one another blessing
and to offer thanks to God.

But more than that,
we came to bless God,
for the last eleven years of life at St. Mark's,
for the next eleven years of life at St. Mark's

We came to bless God
and to give thanks for the gift of resurrection and new life.

And I guess,
if I'm honest,
we came so I could say to you one more time;
God loves you ,
no matter what.