

Pentecost 17A – Final Sunday  
Micah 6:6-8  
Philippians 4:4-9  
John 21:15-17

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Newington, CT

If you are someone who knows our bulletin well, and notices all the different parts within it, you may have noticed that the readings for today are not what were listed from last week's bulletin in our "next week's readings" section. I selected different readings than are part of the revised common lectionary that we use for our weekly selected readings. I'm not one that typically strays from the lectionary (I tend to be a rule follower), but I made an exception for today. I wanted to pick readings to help say goodbye. I flipped through some passages that I knew well in the bible and that often speak to my life, or the lives of others that I have met along the way. I looked up a few, and especially at the endings of many of the letters we have in the New Testament, as many of those letters end with a blessing and a farewell. I looked at Jesus' prayers for his disciples, especially those prayer near the end of his Earthly ministry and Earthly life – but none of these passages resonated with me this week. So, then I fell back to these readings that we read today. These are the readings that I chose for my installation here at Our Saviors about 2 years ago, and I thought reading these again and preaching on them would be a good way to book end my ministry here, and our ministry together, as we gather on the last Sunday I worship here with you.

I wanted to start my sermon by saying thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to be your Pastor. Thank you for the ways we have worked together over these last 2 years. Thank you for the opportunity to get to know you, and care for you. I hope for the very best for the future of Our Saviors. I lift you all up in prayer, and trust in God's presence with you in the steps forward.

God's presence, ever with us.... Our second reading that we have for today speaks to God's presence, briefly and bluntly: "The Lord is near." I have a T-shirt from a youth event at home (I'm not wearing it right now, though I considered it) with a big Superman symbol on the front, with a G instead of an S – and on the back it reads, never fear God is near. That's basically what I hear in this passage, and a message that is often comforting for me and is present throughout scripture. I trust that God is present with all of you, and I trust that God is present in my next steps forward as well. God is always near, and whether there is joy or struggle, God walks alongside us, understands what we are going through, and listens to our prayers and our hearts.

Our Gospel lesson speaks to God's presence to, and I thought about expanding this reading to include the first 14 verses in the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of John and maybe even more verses and chapters, because the setting of this reading and this conversation is so important. After Jesus' death and resurrection – after appearing to Mary Magdalene and the other women at the tomb, and the disciples and then Thomas in the upper room, some of the disciples went back to doing what they knew how to do well, fishing. Jesus comes to them and tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat, and they caught many, many fish. It's a familiar story, similar to a story we have from when the disciples were originally called by Jesus. They recognized that this person telling them where to fish was Jesus at this point, and they had breakfast on the beach together, and that is when Jesus has this conversation with Peter – forgiving and calling him into God's ministry.

Even after Jesus' death, Jesus returned to be with the disciples, and came to them in moments they didn't expect. Jesus still comes to us and is with us in moments

we look for God – in worship, in prayer, in blessed community. And Jesus comes to us in moments we least expect. I pray that Jesus' presence is made known to you continuously, because I trust that God is with you, and God's presence can especially be seen in each other, in one another.

In this Gospel reading, three times Jesus calls Peter to the work and ministry of the body of Christ: "Feed my lambs...Tend my sheep...Feed my sheep." We are all a part of the body of Christ. We are all a part of God's flock. We are all sheep in God's flock. And though now I will be in a different field of God's pasture in this world, we are still together in God's flock, and called together in this mission of feeding and care – all called to care for God's flock, God's people. I pray for you as you continue to tend God's sheep in this place, and God's sheep in the larger community and world that God loves so dearly.

You already know some of the ways to do this work. I've seen it in my time with you. I pray that you live in love, forgiveness, and care. And at the center of all this is the calling we here in our first reading: "Do justice...love kindness, and walk humbly with [our] God." Work towards God's justice in the ways we can and the ways in which you are called. Love kindness, and share God's love with each other and the greater world. And walk humbly with our God. Praise and worship God's holy name. Walk humbly with God and one another. Trust that you are a beloved child of God, and humbly notice and live into the truth that the person across from you is a beloved child of God just like you are.

I will keep you in my prayers, and I ask for you to pray for me too. I am truly grateful for our time as Pastor and people together. I give thanks for you, and I pray that

God guides your steps in your lives and as a congregation together. You have a place in my heart, and I truly hope for the best for you.

I will end my sermon with the words we read today from Paul's letter to the church in Phllipi. It was Paul's message and charge for that church, and its my message, charge, and hope for you as well. "8Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen..., and the God of peace will be with you."

*May the peace that passes all understanding keep  
your hearts and your minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.*