

The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd

The Rev. Christine Love Mendoza

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Proper 16; 1 Kings 8:1,6, 10-11, 22-30, 41-43

This week I was reminded of the time when my daughter Emma showed me video on YouTube of a man trying to golf while two large black swans are harassing him. Or, more accurately, they are harassing his golf bag and push cart, both of which were also black, and looked remarkably like a large black swan. It must have been springtime and mating season because the swans are keyed-up and aggressive and are challenging this bag. The golfer is surprised as the two big birds approach him and then move from aggressive posturing to actually charging the bag. The man, now totally amused by this, challenges them back with the bag, but then runs away dragging the cart behind him, laughing hysterically, while the swans chase after him. This goes on for a while and both the man in the video and his friend who is recording this on his phone are laughing harder and harder, and soon are completely out of control in laughter.

For those watching the video, it is really silly to watch all this play out, but what was most amusing for us was simply the free and uncontrollable laughter of the man and his friend. It was only a 2-3-minute video, but by the end of it, Emma and I both were wiping tears from our faces while gasping for air as our belly muscles ached. At first, we were laughing at the ridiculous swans but then we were gleefully joining the men in their unrestrained laughter. Is there nothing better than that? Some of my best memories are of laughing so hard with someone that the laughter itself became infectious and uncontrollable. By the end of it all, as we wipe away the tears streaming down our faces, blow our noses, and collapse exhausted, we can no longer even remember what started it all in the first place.

One of the greatest blessings in life is laughter. It fills our lives with joy and bonds us closer to each other. Laughter also fills our rooms, buildings, and spaces with delight and draws people together like a magnet. Is there nowhere more pleasing to be than in a place filled with laughter? In some of these joy-filled places, it seems that the laughter seeps into the very structure itself – echoing from the walls long after the occasion of amusement. These are, indeed, blessed spaces.

Prayer can do that too, can't it? Have you ever been somewhere that seems just saturated with prayer? That the very physical structure itself seemed consecrated by the unceasing prayer of those who love, live, laugh, weep, worship, and even rage against God in them. Our prayer matters: it fills and inhabits spaces, gifting us with the felt sense of the presence of God. As God brought forth creation, He blessed it and declared it good, and continues to sustain it with the Holy Spirit. Being created in the image of God, we, too, are gifted with the ability to create. We take from God's first order of creation and are able to make something new. And being God's image-bearers, we, too, are called to bless – bless each other and our creations, and call them good.

Our blessings take the form of prayer – in which we remember who we are and who God is, and we ask for God's Spirit to envelop, enliven, and sustain our creations. In our lesson today from 1 Kings, we heard the account of the dedication of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. With the Temple completed at long, long last, Solomon assembles the elders and tribal leaders of Israel to bring up the ark of the covenant from the city of David. Out of the tents in which it has always resided, the ark, the holy seat of the Lord, now resides in the inner sanctuary of a house made of

stone and wood and decorated with precious metals. After the priests settle the ark into the sanctuary, the awesome presence of the Lord filled the Temple like a cloud, claiming it as God's own.

Solomon's response to this great blessing is to stand before altar of the Lord and pray – to dedicate the Temple to God and in service of God's work and mission in the world. He recognizes God's faithfulness to his covenant with Israel and his steadfast love for his servants. Solomon then asks that God's presence and blessing be upon this "house" that he has built – that this Temple may be a source of blessing and strength for the Israelites, as well as a beacon of hope for the stranger.

As you may have noticed over the past few weeks and read in our weekly parish e-blast, the Shepherd's Staff, we've been busy refreshing and updating our parish campus. The work will continue for the next couple of months but the purpose of all our work is to prepare our parish campus both for the re-invigoration of our current ministries as well as for the launching of new ones. We have been investing in revitalizing our "house" so that it may continue to be a source of blessing and strength for us, as well as provide hope and hospitality for the stranger.

The Holy Spirit is alive and active here at Good Shepherd – can't you feel it? I certainly can. There is a certain generative energy here, filling our campus, our ministries, and our hearts – much like the cloud that filled Solomon's Temple. The Glory of the Lord is indeed here, among us – enlivening our community and enabling and empowering our worship, service, and fellowship. And it is our job to facilitate its live-giving flow. We do so by removing impediments – anything that blocks the movement of the Spirit – and by paying close attention to and discerning the gentle shifts of the Spirit's current and following wherever it leads. Clearing out what has gotten in the way in order to make room for new possibilities has been the intentional effort of many of us this summer. We do this work in the hope that our common life and ministry at Good Shepherd this fall will bless our refreshed spaces here, and that we use these spaces to glorify God, equip the saints for ministry, and continue Christ's work of reconciliation in the world.

From an agricultural point of view, fall is a season of completion, a season of endings. However, in our current culture, fall has become a season of beginnings. In a few days, school begins and with it the promise of new friendships, new wisdom gained, new experiences to be had. The languid pace of summer's long days begins to speed up as the temperatures begin to cool, the air dries, and the leaves turn color. The pace of business at work picks up as well, as folks return refreshed from summer's vacations and are ready to tackle new projects.

Likewise, the church also picks up its pace in the fall, launching the new programming year of faith formation classes, fellowship groups, and service ministries. In two weeks, on Sunday, September 9th, we will have our **Startup Sunday** – often called Rally Day or Welcome Home Sunday in other parishes. That morning, we will start the fall programming year at Good Shepherd with our Faith Formation Kick-off at 9:10am, in which we will provide a preview of our Sunday Christian formation offerings for all ages. We will present our Godly Play and Spark programs for children, and our EYC and GS Youth programs for youth. Afterward, the kids and youth will be guided to their classrooms so they may become familiar with those spaces, while we will discuss with the adults our planned Sunday Adult Forum formation series offerings for the fall. I invite all of you to join us in the Big Room downstairs for coffee and donuts, and to learn about all of these Sunday faith formation offerings.

Then, later that morning at 11:30a, we will host our annual parish Ministry Fair where you may learn all the ways you can connect, grow, and serve at Good Shepherd. Whether you are looking for a service opportunity, a fellowship group, book club, or choir to join – or even if you just want to learn how to knit – you will find it here. Good Shepherd is a busy and vital parish and, this fall, we will bless our spaces on this campus with our time, love, and life-giving energy as we build community, share Christ’s love, and serve our neighbors.

This fall, it is my hope that we fill our campus and these spaces with our prayers, blessings, vitality, and love. I pray that our life lived here seeps deeply into the walls and is felt by all those who enter. May the strangers who come into our midst here find solace, hospitality, and the light of God’ presence, and our campus and its buildings be a beacon of hope within a hurting and lonely world. May these spaces also be filled with abundant joy and laughter, and our delight in each other and in God’s world echo throughout. All this I pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.