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“Shepherd of Surprises”
Trinity-Anjou Pastoral Charge
Sunday, March 26, 2017

Read Sherman

Scriptures: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Ps. 23 (anthem); John 9:1-41

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be a witness, O God, to your Way of love, justice and faithful walking with us. Amen.

Surprise! No sermon today! Ha! Got you there, and it's not even April Fools yet!

No, really, folks! Isn't it amazing that we're all here today? Who would have thought it? Some of us have been coming to this church for 50 years and more, hardly ever missed a Sunday. Wow! Surprise! Others of us are here for the first time today, maybe as a visitor, maybe as friends and family of this beautiful baptism family of Michelle, Johnny and Jackson. Something, or someone, has brought each of us here today to Trinity, and it's not just habit, for some of you old timers, and I don't think it's only chance for those visiting with us today. God has some purpose for all of us to be here this morning. The God of our Jewish ancestors in faith - the God of Samuel, and David; the God a historical man named Jesus once knew as his loving father; brings us together this morning to celebrate something, to acknowledge something. Anyone want to guess what it is? Love. Could it be love, do you think?

Love, sure, for this beautiful child Jackson who we name and celebrate today - all the promise of his young life, to grow up nurtured by such wonderful, loving parents. Love also, for family and friends invited to celebrate this special occasion. By extension this invitation includes all of us as Trinity receives this family into the circle of our care, the circle of our love, now and into the future.

Friends, in a culture that is suspicious of religion, the fact we are here is remarkable! In today's Canada and Quebec where going to the mall, or sleeping in, or playing sports takes up our Sunday mornings, our gathering here this morning is actually counter-cultural. Surprise! How wonderful it is that for a short hour on this Sunday morning, and every Sunday morning, we all are transformed into a large, diverse, imperfect, loving, family. Here, in God's house, each of us belongs - equally. Each of us is accepted as we are. No blame. No guilt. No shame. Together we bring our spirits, our experiences, our gifts to bear to create this spirit of love, joy, of freedom to be that God reveals is ours. Surprise! And though as institutions we can get mighty stuck in our ways, we try to take Jesus' lead. We try to foster a culture of freedom here where

surprises happen everyday that make God smile, if not downright belly laugh!

Now I'm fibbing a bit here. Not everybody likes the surprises that come with so much freedom. I suspect Eliab, eldest son of Jesse, didn't like the fact he was passed over to be God's anointed one and future king - passed over in fact by his pip-squeak of a little brother David. If you've ever been passed over for a job you thought you deserved by right you'll know the sting of what I'm talking about. The Pharisees trying to fathom what Jesus did to cause a man to regain his sight is another case in example. Man they were ticked off by how Jesus was breaking all their rules. They could tell he was on to something, exposing how their idea of religion had become rule-bound, shutting everyone down by shame and blame rather than opening people up to who they were and who God truly was - a loving being who cared nothing for rules, thou shalt and thou shalt not - but only for love, justice, mercy, grace.

For Christians, we see this God in the image of the shepherd of Psalm 23, the one who offers us a paradise to live in not only in heaven after death, but right here and right now. This God wipes away all thought of violence, anxiety, enmity, bullying, pain. Here we find support in the face of our enemies. Our cup is not empty - it actually is overflowing with goodness and mercy - if only we allow ourselves to see it, to feel it.

So friends, and visitors, welcome today to this countercultural community we call our church. A place where we follow a Shepherd of Surprises who turns conventional thinking and wisdom on its head. Perhaps as gratitude for the Love that has brought us here today it is our call then to act always just a bit surprisingly as we go about our daily rounds. Take time to smile at a stranger as you pass by on the street. Suggest going for coffee with someone you've disagreed with, maybe even hated, and ask to hear their story. Try again to dislodge old ideas or beliefs that block you from seeing each person, every creature, as beholding a glimpse of the image of God.

In God's economy of surprises, we need guides, friends, to help keep us humble and keep us open as we continue our walk this Lent. What a blessing that we have each other, and Christ, and new friends we meet here today and old hands too, to explore this surprising freedom God reveals to us as ours in Christ. And I'm telling you, folks, in our day and time this is not what people expect when they think about "religion" or "church." It's enough to make God smile, if not belly laugh! It's even enough maybe to piss some people off royally. And guess what? If Christ be truly present - that love shepherding us right here and right now, should be be at all surprised? Amen.