

The rules of the St. Francis Sunday tradition at Trinity Church include the injunction against long sermons. So, today I will just tell you two short stories. They are both stories which show connections that are of vital importance to us. One in human terms and one as a metaphor for us in sheepy terms.

So first, the sheep story. You'll be reading my Rector's letter in a few days, (won't you?) and see that sheep figure clearly in my missive. So, at one point when writing to it, I reached out to Randy and Gretchen, who have quite a herd of sheep and asked them, "Do the sheep seem to care about each other in the herd? Do they seem to need each other or is it really each ewe for themselves?"

The answer from Gretchen was a resounding yes, they depend on each other. She told me about how they all react at shearing time. They are quite upset as the first one is sheared and then they calm down once they see that their and sisters are surviving the process...just a little naked.

Then Gretchen told me about one time when leading the sheep back from a nearby pasture that one of them kept bleating at her. She followed Gretchen along the fence line and was noisily trying to get her attention. It took Gretchen a minute but then she followed the sheep back around to the other side of a barn and saw that there was one sheep that had been left behind. That sheep would not quiet down until she saw her friend. Gretchen said that she expects a mother to noisily keep after her lambs, but this was new. A sheep was worried about losing her friend.

We feel the same way when we look around our parish and see that people we have cared about are not in the pew with us now. It's hard for us too when the community is rocked by the pandemic and by our recent losses. We care about each other.

And that leads me to my story about Jeremy (who gave me permission to tell this story on the condition that I bless his cat, Raven, in absentia.)

I know we have people who watch this service by live stream and Jeremy is one of them. But I was struck by the way we are drawn together more and more as a parish by that little camera up there.

Thank heavens for our Sr. Warden, Linda Lloyd, who was instrumental in getting this installation accomplished, and thanks to our vestry who saw the importance of this and quickly voted to approve the expense. And thanks to Geoff Brown, who, among many other tasks, keeps us together by hosting the zoom coffee hour each Sunday.

So, last Sunday, when we were at coffee hour in Walker Hall, I opened up my zoom coffee hour session and pointed my phone at some of us gathered there in the parish hall. We could see Jeremy, and others who are so dear to us, and John Oler said to him, "Jeremy, tell us a joke!"

Jeremy said he wasn't really prepared but a joke came to him. He said, "Now, I remember that Heidi mentioned hell in the Gospel reading this morning, so I'll tell you a joke about Satan."

It was a small thing, but I was just so struck by how Jeremy, far away from us, at the moment in Wallingford, was right there with us, and had been during the service too. As are a number of other people now!

We think about all the people who are missing from the pews when we look around, but lo and behold, some of our friends ARE here with us. Our Creator gave us brains to design incredible technology and through that we can continue to experience the most important blessing God has given us, the friendship and love we share with our pets, and our human flock members, both near and far.