

**The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd**  
The Rev. Morgan S. Allen  
February 10, 2019  
*Final Sunday at Good Shepherd, Mark 6:7-13 & Luke 5:1-11*

Come Holy Spirit, and enkindle in the hearts of your faithful, the fire of your Love. *Amen.*

Good morning, Good Shepherd!

Ten years ago, not long after I accepted the call to become your rector, Missy and I gathered around the kitchen coffee pot to discuss how we would break the news of our move to our children: Michael Stephens, who, at the time, was four-years-old, and “Sweet G,” Mary Virginia, who was two-and-a-half. Being conscientious parents, we wanted to do this the right way, so we scheduled an appointment with an expert: Michael’s preschool teacher. We met Ms. Julie in her classroom, and she sat us in small chairs sized for her students. She explained that young children appreciated concrete descriptions, and she suggested preparing maps of Louisiana and Texas to show the path we would travel to our new home. She counseled, “Perhaps, too, you should have some pictures of the church and the house, and maybe some Texas mementos – something tangible, that he can hold and consider.”

This strategy made sense to Missy and me, so we readied maps with red cartographers’ tape that identified Lafayette and Austin. We set a dot on the corner of Windsor and Exposition to mark Good Shepherd’s location, and we collected pictures of the city from our seminary days. Just before the nighttime routine, the next evening we invited Michael to sit at the foot of his bed and we asked Ginna to toddle into his room. Missy and I gathered around them, and I began, “Now, your mother and I have something important to tell you.” I continued, speaking slowly as Ms. Julie had instructed me, “I have accepted a call to serve as a priest at a new church in a new city – The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, in Austin, Texas. This means that in just a few weeks we will move from here – from this house and from Saint Barnabas – and we will begin a new adventure in a new place.”

As I gestured toward Missy to offer him the materials we had assembled, Michael stood – bolt upright – clasped his hands to his head and exclaimed, “You’re gonna be a priest?!?!” ... And, as Ginna laughed, so we realized that our preparations may have slightly overshot our audience.

I shared a version of this story on my first Sunday here, and retelling the tale seems this morning an appropriate bookend. They’re so big now, these children of ours who you have helped us raise: Michael will be fifteen in just more than a month, and Ginna will be thirteen at the end of the summer, and I am so proud of them both. As much as anything else we have shared during our time in this community, I love you for loving them. You are in their bones – your faithfulness, your example, your kindness. So long have they taken stock of you, that your ways are their ways, and I pray that they would remember and treasure the best of our time with you.

This week I presided and preached at all our weekday worship, for which we customarily draw readings from the date-ordered Episcopal compendium of saints, *Holy Women, Holy Men*. Last Monday, the calendar commended the remembrance of Anskar, a tenth-century bishop from Hamburg who established the Church in Denmark and Sweden. His biographer notes that “Anskar’s missionary purpose caused astonishment [among his sending community. They asked,] Why should he wish to leave his brothers [and sisters] to deal with ‘[an] unknown and barbarous folk?’”<sup>i</sup>

Now, don’t get excited: this is not going to be a Texan-satisfying sermon comparing Bostonians to Vikings, or relating the colder climes of New England to those of Scandinavia.<sup>ii</sup> No, instead I invite you to hear the familiar Gospel lesson appointed for Anskar. Reading from the sixth chapter of Mark:

*[Jesus] called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, ‘**Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place ...**’ So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.*”<sup>iii</sup>

Jesus “said to them, ‘**Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave [that] place.**’”<sup>iv</sup>

In their original narrative context, Jesus’ instructions about breads and bags and belts invite the vulnerability of his apostles and the generosity of the communities they will visit, but as I heard Jesus’ commission this week and as I speak it this morning, hear, too, the encouragement for *presence* and for *purpose*. That is, Jesus charges his disciples, “Wherever you make your home, *be at home*, and, for as long as you are there, *be there ...* and, when you leave, *leave*.”

For ten years we Allens have made Good Shepherd our home – and, given the location of the rectory, our several 1972 Buicks, and, for a short time, a pair of baby goats, we can mean that literally. We have been all-in here – *all* of us – no one more than Missy Allen. From Altar Guild, to Shepherd Camp, to the countless unseen and unacknowledged ministries she has tended, she has been selfless and she has been tireless. With other key cogs in this remarkable Good Shepherd machine, be sure that whatever has been accomplished here in the last decade, it would not have been possible without her.

Along with Missy, I am so grateful for the privilege of having served you, not simply “a” priest, as Michael declared it, but *your* priest – *your* preacher and *your* pastor, *your* neighbor and *your* friend, and, as much as my vanity would have preferred to spend these last days packaging projects and polishing ideas so that they look their best after I leave, I know that is not in the spirit of what Jesus commands. No, instead of slowing down ... and coming to a gradual stop ... buckle up, baby, ‘cause we’re going *Thelma & Louise* – 120 with the top down until it’s over!<sup>v</sup> Thereby, I pray, this “being Church” momentum we have mustered for this long season will outlast me and outlast all of us until the Kingdom comes.

See, Jesus' charge encourages a "you-get-what-you-give" ethos. That is, to *make* a home, one must *be* at home, and to realize place and purpose, we must give ourselves *to* a place and *to* a purpose. Bravely, boldly, and generously, you have taught me this truth:

. by your fidelity to this community as a home for faith, you declare that this world will not have the last word!

. by your constancy in prayer and presence, you announce that "even at the grave we [will] make our song, Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia."<sup>vi</sup>

. by your faithfulness to the hope of God's kingdom, you proclaim that the power of love and life will overcome the politics of fear and division, even today – *especially* today!

And, by all these devotions, brother and sisters you do more than simply preach or promise: *you are bringing this new world into being!*

Living with such authenticity and earnestness imperils us, for when we invest ourselves so openly and so completely, we expose our hearts to disappointment and to the scoffing of skeptics. I say to you, *do not be afraid!* Instead, trust that as it has been, so it will be: **you will get what you give.** Not in a karmic, new-age-y, self-interested way, but as the faithful action of the Holy Spirit, accomplishing "far more than [you could] ask or imagine,"<sup>vii</sup> for when your heart is at home and your purpose is greater than yourselves, God will multiply your efforts and makes the *impossible*, possible – such is life in Christ's Church!

*[Jesus] said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.*<sup>viii</sup>

Over and over again, I have witnessed you turning away from disappointment and disbelief to cast your nets into deep waters, and – thanks be to God! – over and over again, you have brought into this boat one catch after another, each even grander than the last. And for as long as you will give yourself – boldly, bravely, generously – *so will this be true* ... not only true this morning or in these years passed, but true tomorrow and true next week, true every year and in every way, as long as Love presides. With a reach across this great city of Austin, ask, "What can the Good Shepherd community achieve?" People of God, those waters are *deep*, and we never saw the sea floor of those possibilities ... *not even close.*

So, once more, I say thank you: thank you for allowing me, in our season, to share in this Beloved Community with you. Oh, how I have loved loving you. Now, keep casting ... and steering the metaphor back to shore, I say leave the top down and keep 'on drivin' – *fast and fun* ... *loud and loved, loved, loved.*

*And so through all the length of days  
Thy goodness faileth never.  
Good Shepherd may I sing thy praise  
Within thy house forever.*<sup>ix</sup>

*Amen.*

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<sup>i</sup> “Anskar.” *Holy Women, Holy Men*. Church Publishing, 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Let it be noted that this Friday, it was in the 50s in Boston, while it was snowing and sleeting all day in Austin.

<sup>iii</sup> Mark 6:7-13.

<sup>iv</sup> Mark 6:10.

<sup>v</sup> Importantly, the speed and spirit, but without the nihilism.

<sup>vi</sup> From “Burial of the Dead, Rite I” in the *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 483.

<sup>vii</sup> Ephesians 3:20.

<sup>viii</sup> Luke 5:4b-6.

<sup>ix</sup> Baker, Henry Williams. “The King of love, my shepherd is” (a paraphrase of Psalm 23). *Hymnal 1982*.