



TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

on the Branford Green

May you find Christ, Community and Compassion within these historic walls.

The Last Poems of Summer

By The Rev. Sharon Gracen

August 31, 2014

Four years ago, on this last Sunday of August, we began our journey in ministry together. Peter and I had left our home in California and traveled across the country in answer to your call. I am rarely nervous before a worship service, but I was that day. The start of something new always conjures the risk of the unknown. I did not know how our journey would go, how we would get along. But I stepped into this sanctuary, this thin-place, in the spirit of Emily Dickinson...

*I never saw a Moor--
I never saw the Sea--
Yet I know how the Heather looks
and what a Billow be.*

*I never spoke with God
Nor visited in Heaven--
Yet certain am I of the spot
as if the Checks were given.*

I knew, without knowing the details, that this was where we were meant to be - as if we had been given a check - which was a colloquial for railroad ticket in Emily's time. No exact destination known, just faith that we are meant to go together.

Who remembers having to memorize poetry in school - and you discovered that Carl Sandburg had written the shortest poem ever. That was the one you wanted to do...

*The fog comes
on little cat feet.*

*It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.*

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There was fog when I first got here. Particularly for you - as you couldn't always see or know what was in my mind and heart. The interesting thing about fog is that when it finally rolls out it seems as though things that were always there now look clearer. Fog has a way of helping you see things in a new way. And then we started to have fun. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote one of the favorite poems of my childhood.

*How do you like to go up in a swing,
Up in the air so blue?
Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing
Ever a child can do!*

*Up in the air and over the wall,
Till I can see so wide,
Rivers and trees and cattle and all
Over the countryside --*

*Till I look down on the garden green,
Down on the roof so brown --
Up in the air I go flying again,
Up in the air and down!*

No idea why I love that poem so much, but it describes how being your rector feels to me - most of the time. So what have we been about in these four years. Well, the task that you gave to me was to help and guide you into being church in a different way. You wanted to become a "program church." You knew that you were ready to be empowered for the many ministries and their budgets in a grander way. Trinity, like so many churches, had existed in a model in which the clergy were responsible for everything and the primary work was pastoral care. The truth is that we are too big for one person to do it all. So you all stepped up and put on new hats. I don't control the money - your finance ministry and vestry do. I don't do all of the pastoral visits and organize care when it is needed. The pastoral care ministry does that and so on. Now, we are not a small church, nor are we a mega church. A.A. Milne describes what we are.

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*Halfway down the stairs
is a stair
where i sit.
there isn't any
other stair
quite like it.
i'm not at the bottom,
i'm not at the top;
so this is the stair
where I always stop.*

*Halfway up the stairs
Isn't up
And it isn't down.
It isn't in the nursery,
It isn't in town.
And all sorts of funny thoughts
Run round my head.
It isn't really Anywhere!
It's somewhere else
Instead!*

We are just right, big enough to do whatever we want with plenty of room for more around the table. It felt a little uncomfortable at first but then we got it. Shel Silverstein nails it.

*Listen to the MUSTN'TS, child,
listen to the DON'TS
listen to the SHOULDNT'S
the IMPOSSIBLES, the WON'TS
listen to the NEVER HAVES
then listen close to me --
anything can happen, child,
ANYTHING can be.*

So, God put us together, on purpose. But what does God want us to be doing? God wants us to be seeking, asking, learning and growing. W. H. Auden knew what that was like.

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*Some say love's a little boy,
And some say it's a bird,
Some say it makes the world go around,
Some say that's absurd,
And when I asked the man next-door,
Who looked as if he knew,
His wife got very cross indeed,
And said it wouldn't do.*

*Does it look like a pair of pyjamas,
Or the ham in a temperance hotel?
Does its odour remind one of llamas,
Or has it a comforting smell?
Is it prickly to touch as a hedge is,
Or soft as eiderdown fluff?
Is it sharp or quite smooth at the edges?
O tell me the truth about love.*

*Our history books refer to it
In cryptic little notes,
It's quite a common topic on
The Transatlantic boats;
I've found the subject mentioned in
Accounts of suicides,
And even seen it scribbled on
The backs of railway guides.*

*Does it howl like a hungry Alsatian,
Or boom like a military band?
Could one give a first-rate imitation
On a saw or a Steinway Grand?
Is its singing at parties a riot?
Does it only like Classical stuff?
Will it stop when one wants to be quiet?
O tell me the truth about love.*

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*Can it pull extraordinary faces?
Is it usually sick on a swing?
Does it spend all its time at the races,
or fiddling with pieces of string?
Has it views of its own about money?
Does it think Patriotism enough?
Are its stories vulgar but funny?
O tell me the truth about love.*

*When it comes, will it come without warning
Just as I'm scratching my nose?
Will it knock on my door in the morning,
Or tread in the bus on my toes?
Will it come like a change in the weather?
Will its greeting be courteous or rough?
Will it alter my life altogether?
O tell me the truth about love.*

We are together to learn the truth about love. That's it, so simple and so very hard, just like Jesus said. Perhaps the thing that can help us the most is a little E.E. Cumming.

*i carry your heart with me(i carry it in
my heart)i am never without it(anywhere
i go you go, my dear; and whatever is done
by only me is your doing, my darling)
i fear
no fate(for you are my fate, my sweet)i want
no world(for beautiful you are my world, my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you*

*here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life;which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart*

i carry your heart(i carry it in my heart)

You see, whether we get it or not, we are carried in God's heart just as we carry one another and God in ours. I know I carry you in mine.

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