

Serving Others, Serving Christ©**August 11, 2013****Matthew 25:31-46****Commissioning Service****Dr. Sharlyn Gates**

This passage, a favorite of Shaun's, is a passage put on Shaun's heart – the call of Christ to serve others and in doing so, serving Christ.

It is a call to act as Jesus did – to care for the hungry, the poor, the homeless, the outcast. And Jesus says if you did it to any of these, you actually are doing it, not just *for* me, but *TO* me.

Believe me, you don't want to be a goat, in this situation. The goats are the ones who ignored that call to care. If you are a goat, you are doomed. In this passage, the goats get the bad rap. They are the ones who were self-centered, unconcerned with anyone in need.

To be among the herd of goats is to be outside the circle of Christ's friends because if you don't care for those He cares for, Jesus is saying you really don't care for Him either. To be in the flock of the sheep – that's where we want to be.

Of course, it isn't really about sheep and goats. It's about people – people who take the call to discipleship to heart; people who want to be like Christ; people who love Christ.

Today we are witnessing the result of one young man who has taken that call to heart. For Shaun, the call to care for others included taking a step in faith, going out on a limb and beginning a plan of study that would be intense and that would not always be easy, especially considering that he has a wife, and now a baby daughter, and a full time job with many responsibilities.

Yet, the call Shaun heard in this passage led him, first to serve for many years in ministry with youth in the church where he is a member, the First Presbyterian Church of Fenton, where he has been nurtured, the church where he has grown in his faith and understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

And for more than 18 months, we at Holly have had the blessing of his growing in ministry development among us. And then, you who are disciples in the Mundy Presbyterian Church have had the blessing and the gift of experiencing Shaun's leadership, but also the responsibility of nurturing him in his practice of being in the pulpit and preaching the Word of God.

And now – this is where that journey has led – to a commissioning service where Shaun is being commissioned to serve congregations in the Presbytery of Lake Huron.

For this time and place, he is being commissioned by the presbytery to serve the congregations of Mundy and Holly Presbyterian Churches, even as he remains a member at Fenton.

And so with great delight, we join together, along with the entire presbytery, to witness and share in this great and meaningful service.

We can give thanks to God for Commissioned Ruling Elders like Shaun, who are willing to put themselves in places where they are servants of God, helping congregations – many of whom cannot financially support a full time ordained pastor – and there are many churches in that place today.

To become a Commissioned Ruler Elder (whom we used to call Commissioned Lay Pastor) is to be called into service to Christ. It's about having the call of ministry on your heart to care for those whom Christ cares for – the little ones who are in need. It is about serving small churches to help them thrive and grow in faith.

But this isn't just about a call to Commissioned Ruling Elders, nor is it about being called to serve as a pastor in whatever category we are in. This is about the call of Christ our Lord to serve in His Church, regardless of the position.

All who are followers of Jesus are expected to have the heart of the sheep in this passage. They are the ones who see someone who is hurting and in need and who will do something to help.

Simple things at times, yet important acts of compassion: give them food if they are hungry; give them shelter if they are homeless; visit them when they are sick or alone in prison; give them a drink if they are thirsty. Offer them the love of Christ.

St. Francis of Assisi said: "Preach Christ, and if all else fails, use words." By our actions we are preaching – all of us, preachers – we are giving them Christ Jesus, and in our care, we are also loving and caring for Christ himself.

I believe that I can honestly speak for all of us here today – that we have seen Shaun (and Michele) in that servant-hood position.

There is no glory in being a servant except that the glory is in the serving itself – when the serving is for Christ, the great Servant of us all.

Today as we commission Shaun, let us make a commitment to ourselves, to one another, and to Christ, that we will serve with love and compassion and that we will be the hands and feet of Christ. May we be comforted and encouraged by the words of Jesus who said:

I am the good shepherd.

I know my own and my own know me.

He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
He will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom. *John 10:14; Isa. 40:11*

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