

Final sermon Habakkuk and Ephesians 4:11-12

Here we are, my final weekend with you and my last sermon as a called, ordained pastor.

Before I go any further, I want to tell you **that you have always been my favorite worship service of the weekend.**

Sat. 5:00

There is something special about ending a busy Saturday with worship.

Maybe because this is an evening service and the light outside is usually low or dark, there is an intimate feeling. Some of you come almost an hour early to have a cup of coffee with friends and chat about the week.

There is a casual ease and special sense of welcome on Saturday nights.

I want to thank you for your faithfulness, your willingness to laugh at my jokes and your attentiveness to my message. I also have said for years that on my last Sunday I would have to apologize for times that worship felt like a dress rehearsal.

Being the first service of the weekend has meant that you have heard more than a few sermons that needed to be redone by 8:00 the next morning and you have sung a few hymns that turned out to be clinkers, which would be abandoned on Sunday morning for something more singable.

But you have taken all of that in good spirit and for some inexplicable reason, return week after week, year after year.

I love you all and will miss our time together dearly.

Sun. 8:00

There is something special about getting up early and beginning the day, and week, with worship.

Some of you are early risers but others, myself included, are still waking up, so we arrive with coffee in hand or head for the coffee pot as soon as possible.

I am so aware that you could have slept in, but you didn't.

You are the ones who understand worship, as a discipline.

If you are in town, you are here, come rain or shine.

You are the hardy ones, who brave the coldest temperatures and will drive unplowed side streets to get here.

One of the things I really appreciate about the 8:00 crowd is the amazing amount of care and support you give each other. At this service, I have seen family members, who've lost a loved one during the week, show up on Sunday, because you, "just needed to be here."

And immediately people surrounded you to give comfort.

Some of you have known each other for decades or lifetimes but you are also willing to make new friends in the pews.

Good for you!

I want to thank you for your faithfulness, your willingness to laugh at my jokes and your attentiveness to my message.

I also have said for years that on my last Sunday I would have to apologize for times that worship lacked energy.

I am not by nature an early riser. Sometimes it's like I left my brain under the covers in bed.

But you have taken all of that in good spirit and for some inexplicable reason, return week after week, year after year.
I love you all and will miss our time together dearly.

10:30
There is something special about the energy and spontaneity of our 10:30 service.
Maybe it's because there is always a surprise.
Anything could happen, ...and usually does.

This is the service where pews are often filled with close friends and extended families. Cousins and kids might be sitting with each other's parents or grandparents.

And we have lots of children at this service. Sometimes it can be noisy but honestly no one seems to care.
I discovered early on that at 10:30, I am not the only preacher. I look down from the pulpit speaking about love but in the pews a baby or toddler, who has just learned to smile or wave, has captured the hearts of a whole section of pews. There are all of these people making faces or waving to get the child to respond.

And children's sermons remind us of the joy of everyday events, with announcements of successful potty training, or forgiveness after having to sit on the naughty chair or the real grief when a pet dies. They are often the better preacher. And I am okay with that because I know that sometimes that's how God speaks to our hearts.

You are an accepting and welcoming bunch of people who linger over doughnut holes after church and sometimes have

to be told to stay as long as you want, just lock the door behind you.

I want to thank you for your faithfulness, your willingness to laugh at my jokes and your attentiveness to my message. I also have said for years that on my last Sunday I would have to apologize for times when my sermon got away from me. I always think of new things to say when I preach and by the third-time round, I am usually on a roll.
However, you have taken all of that in good spirit and for some inexplicable reason, return week after week, year after year.

I love you all and will miss our time together dearly.

And now I want to say a few words about being a minister.
Instead of the appointed Bible texts for this weekend, I've chosen verses that have been significant for me in my ministry and to our ministry together.

Last week I told you how important the *parable of the sower* was to my ministry. Underneath my work as a pastor has been God's call, **to just plant the seeds** and Jesus' promise that **God will give the growth.**

But long before seminary and long before I was a pastor, I was a lay professional in the church and served as a Christian Ed and Youth Director for 7 years.
It was an interesting time in the church. The first woman had just been ordained but there was also a greater emphasis on lay ministry and the call we all have by our baptisms. So as ordained ministry became more available there was also a greater emphasis on not needing ordination to do the work of God.

I started reading some things by William Diehl, former president of Bethlehem Steel who looked to his own baptism to find what he called the Monday Connection or ministry in daily life.

At the same time, Luther's understanding of vocation was getting a second look.

There were these workshops and conferences about our baptismal calls. That's when I discovered Ephesians 4:11-12, which listed pastors as just one of many needed roles in the Body of Christ, the church.

All the saints are needed to work together in unity for service. That was and continues to be exciting stuff! We need each other.

Once in seminary I translated Ephesians 4:11-12 myself, from the Greek and I chose it to be my ordination verse. This is how it looked on my ordination invitations and bulletin covers, and my translation reads:

CHRIST'S GIFT
was that
some should be apostles,
some prophets,
some evangelists,
some pastors
& teachers
So that
the saints together
make a unity
in the work of service
building up
the
BODY of CHRIST

At my ordination, we also sang, **The Church is the people.**

The first verse goes:

1. The church is not a building;
the church is not a steeple;
the church is not a resting place;
the church is a people.

Refrain:

I am the church! You are the church!

We are the church together!

All who follow Jesus,

all around the world!

Yes, we're the church together.

I still like that song.

After ordination, I was a pastor developer and started a congregation in Oshkosh. I got to give it its name and based my choice on this Ephesians text. I chose to name it All Saints.

I used to tell them that we were going to be a church where all the saints were needed to work together.

Having started my ministry with this text, I thought it would be fitting to end with it too.

And it has a great message for me as I end ordained ministry. My time as a called pastor is coming to a close but my Baptismal ministry will continue. God has work for me in the kingdom in the days and years ahead.

And these two verses from Ephesians can be helpful for you too, during this transition. Someone said to me this week, "What is Our Savior's going to be without Pastor Cath?"

I told her that Our Savior's is going to continue to be the great congregation it always has been, because the church is not the pastor...it is the people.

The church is the people, the saints, together in unity, in the work of service, building up the Body of Christ.

Through baptism, we are all ministers.

We all have a ministry.

For a retired pastor and for a faithful congregation this is Good News.

This is the Good news of the Gospel.

Just a footnote here. I think it was Erma Bombeck who wrote a separate letter to each of her children, that began with the words *You have always been my favorite.*

If you want to know about what is special about the other 2 services, you will have to go to our website and read my sermon there.

On a personal note.

Thank you for calling me 21 years ago.

Thank you for inviting me into your significant life moments.

Births and deaths, baptisms, weddings, first communions, confirmations, funerals.

In our time together, my own faith has deepened and you have taught me to be a better pastor.

It has been a great and wild ride. Bill and I love you all!
You will forever remain in our hearts and prayers.

God Bless You All!

Now let's sing: