

A Whole Lot of Blessings
Philippians 1:3-11
June 13, 2021
Rev. Shannon White
Farewell Worship at Wilton Presbyterian Church

As I started to think about this day several months ago, I consulted with a mentor/coach of mine. How do I leave well? I asked him... I want to leave well. Sure, I've left well from other places, but each has had their own issues I've had to address.

So how do I leave well from **here**, I asked him? He responded by asking me which scriptures came to mind of leave taking. We discussed Jesus' death and Resurrection; Jesus' subsequent ascension, and a story which has always left me somewhat melancholy, the story of Moses' departure... where he addresses the children of Israel, telling them after all they had been through together, that someone else, another leader, would have to take them into the Promised Land, even as they could see it in the distance.

We talked about how the final months of my time here might be seen in its entirety as a blessing and benediction. Each week and action, each committee meeting, each interaction being a piece of a mosaic which would ultimately be seen as a final blessing.

Now, I don't fancy myself to think that I'm anything resembling a messianic figure. God knows that's not true, nor would I want anyone to put me on a pedestal. My job here has been to take you a part of your way, and now to hand the baton on to the next leader who will take you the next steps, until he or she passes it on to the next pastor.

So, as I thought about the sermon for THIS day, I thought a series of blessings would be appropriate. To celebrate our life together for this

part of the journey and to bless you on your way with the knowledge that God has been with us, is with you now and will be with you in the future.

So, we begin here, in this space where we sit. I bless our courtyard, as the pathway into our complex... people coming with all sorts of needs and desires... some met and some still seeking answers as recently as yesterday morning... and maybe even today. May our pathway always be clear for all people to come in and go out freely.

I bless this office hallway, where dedicated pastors and staff have walked and gathered, exchanging ideas, and collaborated for the last 5 decades. The mixing of the serious and hilarious... of tears and disagreements and hysterical laughter live in those walls... which dare not utter some things.

I bless the offices, where ideas are formed; where tender conversations of pastoral care have been held; where joys, hopes, deep sadness, anger and forgiveness have been expressed; where premarital appointments have been held and funeral arrangements have been made; where tears have been shed, and the most precious ideas and theological questionings have evolved.

I bless the Church office: where Carolyn, preceded in my tenure by Suzanne and Patty have worked tirelessly to ensure the church runs smoothly. Very few realize the pressures which rest in that office and on those wonderful people. Please don't ever take them for granted. Be kind and gracious to them... you don't want to lose them. They are the keeper of many secrets!

I bless the copy room where countless communiques are printed so that you may know what is happening in the life of the church and be full participants in worship.

I bless our rooms downstairs/our lower core... once solely youth rooms and nursery... reimagined to include in these changing times to host Abilis and Music on the Hill. Expanding our mission to house people who need a space to meet.

I bless our parish hall: a place where countless people have come to gather for fellowship hour, for vacation bible school, for outside renters—such as Kiwanis and sports clubs, for parties (including my wedding reception), for fundraisers; and for community events such as *Stop Hunger Now*, and the *Day of Recovery and Wellness* ~ using our space to provide for others... But most of all, I bless this space for the place of worship that it has been. Actually all of the activities I just mentioned could be considered as acts of worship, because all we do for God is an act of worship, including packing meals for those who are hungry... but I bless it as the place of our worshipping beginnings at this complex, the creative ways the room was reconfigured each week to show that worship can take place in a variety of forms and in a variety of spaces ~ whether for Sunday morning or Maundy Thursdays, Ash Wednesdays or the week between Christmas and New Year's...

I bless the church school rooms: places where our children meet to learn about Jesus and their part in the family of faith; I bless for Julie Fowler (and her predecessors during my tenure: Nate Taylor, Jamie Lewis, Shari Richards, Jane field, Becky Hudspeth) and all the teachers who volunteer their time and use the gifts God has given them; I bless those rooms as well for the countless gatherings of AA members during day and night meetings who come to hear a message of hope and recovery; for space given to the music of our bells and of Wilton Singers, who bring us such joy as they use their gifts playing and singing a variety of music, which most assuredly touches the heart of God; I bless our nursery, and our faithful workers Kate and Lucia, who have loved and cared for our

youngest children of God while their families are worshipping in other parts of our building.

I bless the kitchen, where countless meals for church members, fundraisers, Kiwanis gatherings, midnight runs and open door shelter/manna house offerings are lovingly constructed; monthly snacks for coffee hours, and coffee for AA and vaccine clinics have prepared... all to show the love and hospitality of our ministries... to welcome people in the name of God and to hope that love is communicated in the simplest cup of joe or a bite which is shared.

I bless St Matt's sanctuary and offices... in THIS 50th year of joint ministry... no, we haven't had the chance to honor that most sacred connection yet... but there has been SO much good in this extraordinary partnership over our decades together. Collaborations, joint ministry, shared space and ideas... and events such as the drive-by nativity this past year; A joint labyrinth, and much needs to be celebrated in this model of ecumenism which is extraordinary! Blessings to Rev. Marissa Rohrbach, Rev. Alon White, Rev. Mary Grace Williams ~ the rectors during my tenure and their wonderful staff: Samantha Trolice, Becky Hudspeth, and all their office personnel, and vestry members).

I bless our memorial garden... where our beloveds have been put to rest, and where more will follow. Where tears have been shed but assurance in the hope of resurrection as well. I bless the hours of loving work of our garden tenders as they use their gifts to ensure that the garden represents our very best.

I bless this sanctuary... this beautiful space where God has been praised in word/spoken and sung, in melody and in silence. Where people who come from different faith traditions and call the holy by different names have come to join with us together in worship of God ~ Where we have heard the most heartbreaking news and sung our hearts out in the

heartiest ways to praise our creator; where bagpipes and organ have played and jazz and country as well under the leadership of Zachary Wright and Al Galletly before him with the assistance of our talented choir and handbell choir; where tough sermons have been preached and where all have come together as one around the table of our Lord.

I bless the basement underneath the sanctuary as a symbol of what exciting ministry is yet to be. God's spirit has been moving and will work with you as you discern how that space may be used to serve others.

But if this year has taught us anything... or reminded us in our situation... the church is and never has been about the building. It is about the community and God's spirit moving in and through willing congregants planting seeds and watching them grow into full-fledged ministries. And so, this final blessing is for you. You, wonderful people of Wilton Presbyterian Church....

Be who God is calling you to be; continue to serve your hearts out, as you always have; welcome the stranger and give in uncommon ways; continue to break barriers in your extravagant loving; continue to think outside the box and be creative in your expressions; Don't settle for mediocrity and religiosity... speak with authenticity and be real with one another with compassion; Don't settle for what you know or what's easy... in ministry... dare to go out and experience something uncomfortable and new. That is where the Spirit abides...

There's no doubt that there is some fear over the loss of membership we have experienced. We need you to dig in deep and use your gifts, so that those who have been volunteering don't burn out. Blessings to our session (clerk Berta Hull) and deacons, committee chairs. They need you... but more importantly... WPC needs you to serve. God hasn't brought any of us this far to leave us. The Promised Land is right over the

horizon, and then the next one as well. We are never THERE... until we reach our final destination.

But most importantly, remember this: love God with all of your hearts and minds and bodies and love your neighbors as you love yourselves ~ and you will be fine. May it be so! Alleluia Amen!!