

As many of you know, I’ve worked with our Bishops the last 30 years caring for the Seminarians of our Synod. And over the years that has meant that I have visited countless congregations, often during times of struggle in their ministry. And if there is a common denominator to congregations that basically aren’t functioning, it is that they are sitting “dead in the water.” There is no sense of mission. There is no drive for movement. They sit and they wait for things to happen. It is like a ship permanently docked in the harbor. And that’s not what ships are built for.

To be the church is to be a people in movement. Going to those places, going to those people that need to be touched by the love and grace of God. It is that image in our Gospel this morning that shows the shepherd out looking for that lost sheep. It is that image that runs through our first and second lessons that talk about a God of grace that does wondrous things, even with the likes of me...and you.

And the bottom line is, it is easier and safer to sit in port. Because journeys cost money. Journeys take energy. Journeys are risky. In those days after 9/11 as we gathered here for daily Eucharist for weeks on end, we began to use the *Servant’s Prayer* with regularity. It is a practice that has continued in many of our liturgies. It is a prayer that is printed on Pastor’s and my calling cards. *Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through challenges unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

And that is what it is to be the church.

Over the years the unwillingness of this Family to sit in port has meant the beginning of wonderful new ministries, many of which have come at a cost.

When we began housing the homeless a quarter century ago, wonderful new relationships began...and believe it or not, people left our parish.

Twenty years ago as we struggled with the idea that music was more important than worship, we claimed the centrality of worship in our Family life...and you're seeing the result of those decisions this morning...but once again, people left our parish.

As we struggled with issues of faithfulness and inclusivity when it came to issues of sexuality 15 years ago, we claimed the fullness of the church...and people left our parish.

And 9 years ago as this Family became a care center that ministered to hundreds and hundreds of people in the aftermath of 9/11...we had folks who left the parish because in addition to caring for the terrorist victims, we opened doors to the Islamic community and denounced the bigotry that surrounded us that is so easy to market. Then...and now.

(Just a footnote here...long before the current mosque controversy in NY, we had scheduled Dr. Ali Chaudry to be with us this fall to again help us learn more about Islam. Ali is a long time friend from my teaching ministry at St. E's and Drew, the former mayor of Basking Ridge and an articulate spokesperson for building wholeness in community).

Yesterday as we gathered for our 9/11 Memorial Eucharist, Pastor reminded us that *"...in these last 9 years a lot of people have wandered off and become lost in fear, in hatred, in bigotry, in revenge, in violence and war...since that day 9 years ago many have forgotten the accounting of God's kingdom, where not one is lost."*

And that's why we do what we do. We take seriously that God's hand is leading us and his love supporting us. We have places to go. We have people to meet. We have things to do. Come join the journey, come share the hope; proclaim the promise; live the grace of Easter. Come be the church with us.