

## SECURITY BLANKET

6 Easter- B May 6, 2018

John 15:9-17

Reading this morning's gospel text, I thought about prayer shawls and security blankets.

Off and on since Emmanuel congregation began, there have been prayer shawl knitters among us. Brenda and our daughters knit today thanks to the prayer shawl ministry at our former congregation. That ministry began after I received a shawl from another congregation in following my dad's death. I spoke about it in a sermon, which led to conversation, and a movement that effectively said: "We can do that here."

At least two members who were part of this congregation, Alice Pratt and Janet Kott, were participants in the prayer shawl ministry of Outer Banks Presbyterian Church. Likewise, All Saints' Church has a prayer shawl ministry and gives shawls, not just to the sick, but also to those who need a reminder of God's loving embrace. What a great way to share God's love through the hands and hearts that give a handmade gift of warmth! Not surprisingly, Father Tom and Pat were presented with prayer shawls last Sunday—as gifts of love from All Saints' to remind them God's loving embrace. The church they embraced for 15 years bid them a happy retirement and let them know that the prayers of All Saints' are with them as they transition into this new phase of life and ministry.

I mentioned prayer shawls *and* security blankets because I have found a few parallels. If you are a fan of Charles Schulz's "Peanuts," I'm sure you've seen "A Charlie Brown Christmas" (a number of times), particularly the poignant scene where Linus, who is never seen without his security blanket, lovingly places that blanket as a tree skirt for the humble tree—a tree that, with each offering, transforms from a twig to a lush and beautiful announcement of the Savior's birth. What greater honor could Linus give *than by giving up that which he never let go of*—as a sign to those who looked upon this tree. Linus also quoted Luke's gospel to remind his friends (and the viewers) why (and who) we celebrate. The blanket, wrapping the tree, becomes a reminder of God's full embrace of humanity in Jesus.

In today's passage of John's gospel, we hear Jesus' words to his friends in this "Farewell Discourse." They remind us that God in Christ embraces us: he calls us his own and tells us that we are loved. Even as he is about to face the cross, he speaks words of hope and promise and love. *"Just as the Father has loved me I have loved you. You are my friends; and what greater love can there be except to lay down one's life for one's friends? I chose you. I have called you my friends because I love you. The Father loves you. Abide in that love. By remaining loving, one with another, your joy will be complete."* [John 15:9-17 paraphrased]

To me, this is what God looks like. This is my vision of Jesus who walked this earth. Not merely the images imprinted in my mind by artists' depictions of The Almighty, but by seeing the Holy One in the seemingly ordinary things of life that touch people with love. This is the way we remember the people we love—through the words and actions that said to us: "You belong." So it is with God and, by extension, with God's people.

Love is, I think at its deepest level, a full acceptance of the object of that love. The Good News is that God has already done that for us. "In Christ there is no east or west, in him no south or north: but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth." [ELW 650 alt.] And

the Good News becomes real when we—who are loved and accepted by God—recall that Jesus told his friends that we are entrusted and commanded to “go and do likewise.”

“Abide (live, remain) in my love,” Jesus said. Like a warm blanket or a knitted shawl wrapped around us, Jesus’ love and acceptance gives us a sense of security and comfort. The Incarnate One, the Word that became flesh and lived among us, is the one whose touch changed peoples’ lives forever.

Remember some of those touched by Jesus: the blind beggar along the road, the lame man lowered by his friends through an opening in a rooftop, the ten lepers outside a city wall, the woman at the well...just to name a few.

Think of others whose lives were forever changed by their encounters with the Holy One of God: the religious leader who met with Jesus at night, the tax collector, the woman caught in adultery, the crowd of hungry and curious listeners who were fed with a boy’s small lunch.

We honor Jesus as we recognize that he embraces everyone. We break the bread and proclaim that his own body is given “for you and for all people.” Jesus, who touched so many, wrapped his arms around the world as he went to the cross *for all*.

“No one has greater love for his friends than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Jesus did that for us: for all of us. “You did not choose me, I chose you,” he said. Long before we even knew about this Jesus, he had already accepted us, and wrapped us with the warmth of his love.

He asks us to do for the world what he has already done: wrap it in love. May you who know you have been embraced by God in Jesus do as he has asked, encouraged, and yes, commanded: Go in peace. Wrap everyone you meet in God’s loving embrace. Serve the Lord. Amen.