**Introduction**

Vanity of vanities, all is vanity…

There is no way I’m preaching my final sermon in this pulpit from that sourpuss of Ecclesiastes.

Except to second the notion toward the end, “there is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This is from the hand of God.” And the past 14 plus years, at least for me, have been such an enjoying toil – a blessing form the hand of God.

**Text**

But the warning of the lectionary texts this week is fruitful pondering for a final sermon. Because the warning is against taking stock. The warning is against trying to sum everything up and enter into some type of personally won rest. And that is often what final sermons – at least the samples that I have read in preparation - are. There are the gross ones: look at how much we have done. There are the ones who at least wash that sentiment through God: look at how much God has accomplished through us. But so many of them struck me as versions of the guy in our gospel lesson. Look at the job we have done for the kingdom, we deserve to relax, eat, drink and be merry over this.

I think it is fruitful meditation for two reasons. The first reason is that it reminds us whose the church is. Any individual pastor is but an under-shepherd. Christ is the good shepherd. He knows all the numbers. Not a single one will be lost to him. As an under-shepherd, I commit you to the care of the Good Shepherd. There really isn’t a discontinuity because Christ is always present for his church. Wherever two or three are gathered in His name, Christ is there. And that continues. And God is superabundant in his means of grace. That is from the Lutheran confessions, from Luther’s Smalcald Articles. It’s always been my favorite quote from them. Luther starts to list all the ways. The Spoken Word – which continues in the lessons read. And you will get to hear some other voices. Baptism, which you pass the remembrance of every time you enter here. The Supper will continue. It may be on different timing, but it will be here. The pronouncement of the absolution if not by the called and ordained servant, from the Good Shepherd himself in his promise. And the last thing Luther reminds of is the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren – the priesthood of all believers. The under-shepherd may hold the keys for a bit for public use, but they are always given the church. God is superabundant in his grace. The Good Shepherd remains the head of this church with all his gifts.

For the second reason I really want to segue from the shepherd image to the one of the vineyard. The vineyard is the LORD’s and he works in it. But he also calls workers to the vineyard. The vineyard remains here and it remains fruitful. And you all are called to work it. Some of that work will be the same. Some of it will be different. And it will be work. We don’t live in Eden, nor the new Jerusalem where the trees produce 12 crops a year. But this work is not vanity. This work is not the striving after the wind. This work is the fruitful labor. It is the toil in which you may find enjoyment, because it is from the hand of God. It is a laboring beside the Lord of the vineyard. God builds his Kingdom and invites you to take part with him.

For a time you will not have an under-shepherd. But that time is to remember some important things. THE Shepherd is Christ, and we are all called to find enjoyment working besides Jesus. And Jesus has already taken stock. He’s done that when he sealed each and every one of you before the foundation of the world.

**Conclusion**

Enough of the lessons.

Like Paul talking to the Ephesian elders, I don’t know that I shall see you this side of the New Jerusalem. Maybe some of you will find me in the desert. Maybe I’ll get another child to go to my Alma Mater and take a trip up. We don’t know.

But here are the things that I do know.

You have certainly been a blessing to me, and my family. We thank you for putting up with us for 14 plus years. And taking care of us so well.

I believe I preached the gospel and taught everything that Jesus gave to us through the apostles. We proclaimed and lived the one, holy, catholic and apostolic faith. Forgive my faults, they are mine. And if my ministry was of some good, know that it was not the servant, but the Lord.

And keep the faith, which I know that you will do, because that faith is not by human effort. It is the living work of the Holy Spirit within you. And that work I have seen bear fruit in so many ways over these years. As it will continue to do so in the future with whoever the Good Shepherd sends. It is work, a toil, but an enjoying one. Because the work done for the kingdom will last.

And I know that you shall always be in my prayers. As you entered them on a call day almost 15 years ago, and have not left them since, you will not leave them. Those closest to my heart. And I ask that you keep us in yours.

And now I commend you to the Father, and to the Word of his grace – Jesus Christ our Lord - and to the Holy Spirit who lives mightily in you, who is able to build you up and give you the inheritance: who has called, gathered, enlightened, sanctified and keeps every one of us in this body of Christ. Amen.