

Rev. Marya DeCarlen
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It's wonderful to look out at all of you during this moment of your year long centennial celebration. It's like looking at a seedbed of memory of the last 30 years of my ministry and yours, and it's wonderful to see all of you. I'm deeply grateful to Billie Phillips who contacted me as a member of the centennial committee for this invitation and for Clyde's many kindnesses as well. And it's lovely for me to be with you as we all celebrate with joy the centennial year of St. Andrew's Church.

Last summer before my youngest son Jacob left for his first year of college at WPI, I found a stash of his legos and placed lego figures each room of my home, in my car...and my office at church. I wanted a visual way to remind myself of his creative and focused engineering finesse spanning his years from 3-19 yrs. The legos figures I placed in all the rooms of my life, was his gift to me, the things he touched and loved, and my connection to him.

At a deeper level, holding on to those legos revealed my desire to be connected, to be remembered, to have and to know my place in his life. Don't we all want that? Regardless of how old we are or the circumstances of our lives, we want to know: Who are the people I am connected to that will continue to enrich my life? What is my purpose in this world? Many of us take time and space to make sense of these questions and wrestle with the answers. All our lives are a training ground for love. Our deaths are a training ground for our lives.

When we search for these answers about life and our death, ultimately, we are searching for God especially during life transitions: death of a family member or friend, empty nest, new employment, new diagnosis ...and the list goes on. In those moments we want something to hold on to, something to comfort, encourage, and reassure us; a lego that will guide us through that moment of our life.

These are the very questions Jesus is addressing as he speaks to his disciples in today's gospel. Jesus is speaking his final words to his disciples and trying to share a glimpse of what their life will be like without him fully present and enfolded with them. We embrace, as the disciples would learn, that love transcends time, miles and death. Sadness, fear, and desperation will often cause me to remind myself of a love connection that is both present and eternal. We often do this reminding with ourselves not only with one another but also in our relationship with Jesus.

At some point we must let go of the legos in our lives because it is our actions that behold the presence of divine love. We are the connection not the legos. Remember again what he tells his disciples:

- I love you with the same love that God loves me.
- Turning the diamond around to see my love from all perspectives, remain in my love.
- I give to you the joy that God and I share.
- Bear fruit, to love another. You've got this.

As a church we are formed and identified by our history, by where we have been in our past and where our history is leading us. So during this centennial year, we stand at a place like the place

from which John told the story of Jesus. We look to our history — the history of God's people, in this congregation — starting with Isaac Chauncey Wyman who attended St. Michael's in Marblehead, and...out of concern for the absence of Sunday school opportunities for children, bequeathed Wyman woods to St. Michael's to use part of this land and a sum of money for the building of a memorial chapel near the Wyman family burial plot, for the spiritual education of children of all denominations and for social activities of neighborhood groups. (yes St. Andrew's was begun with a hope for ecumenism!!)

The lay and ordained leadership at St. Andrew's, from its humble beginnings in 1924, have been and are the love of Christ. I have had the joy of experiencing how your faith empowered how you saw yourselves, one another, and the neighbors around you. Of course, I can only go back to the the 80's with the spiritual leadership of Ward and Joanne Gamble (who arrived in the 70's) and then in the early 2000's with the spiritual leadership of Kevin and Megan Bean and now with the spiritual leadership of Clyde and Kate Elledge. Remember with me, how you give to others the joy that God gives you. Remember with me how in a busy, fragmented society, you have a history of being balm to others by taking time to connect regularly and deeply:

- St. Andrew's started in your own budget, a line item called Community Action and a committee to designate funds for oil, electricity, rental assistance, food etc that was 5% of your total budget
- St. Andrew's was part of the Collaboration with Marblehead Counseling Center started by Jack Weltner to support the Mental Health needs of us and our neighbors
- Many of you might remember the initiative Beyond War... with Ward and Joanne in the mid eighties
- You started a relationship with parish in El Salvador and engaged in Mission trips
- You sponsored the Ha family from Vietnam and their integration and settlement. They lived in white house across from driveway...where nursery school started
- You started the nursery school
- Your ministry of the Rummage Sale for the past 60+ years has helped folks equip their homes and clothe their families
- The Interfaith covenant started in the 70s...
- A prison ministry started by Rick Howard
- Involvement in Raw Arts, a youth art initiative in Lynn
- Your vibrant ministry for those who are food insecure includes engagement with My Brother's Table (where there is a room named for Jane Hunt) Crombie Street, the SPUR community garden and Marblehead Food pantry in partnership with the city of Lynn thanks to the leadership of Dulany Alexander
- You collected toiletries from your travels and distributed them to people in need of personal care products.
- In the early 2000's you engaged in Community Organizing with ECCO starting with Kevin Bean and many lay leaders addressing the root causes of fair wages, and now housing injustice with the Leadership of Clyde.
- More recently you offered holy space to the Buddhist community for their Tsonga's.
- You hosted anti-racism trainings and held vigils outside the church for Black Lives Matter)
- You created the Marblehead Youth Coop Ministry

Yes, when we are a balm to others, we keep Jesus' commandment to love one another. Every time you show love toward other people, you live the way Jesus showed us and you abide with others the way Jesus abides with us. You remain present and hold others in God's love as God remains present and holds us in love. And that's the way we find joy in connection with the Divine.

I never did tell my son, Jacob about the placement of his Legos in my world. As we were driving home from the end of his first year of college this week, he found the lego figure that has been in my center console. As I told the story about why it was there, I realized in a new way that the legos were not the thing that carried his presence. I was. I was the last thing he touched when he hugged and kissed me. I was the one who received his words, "I love you." My being carried his presence and our shared love. The connection was and always had been within me... not in a Lego. Likewise, your long and engaged history of loving one another like Jesus loves has been the way for you to carry God's presence within you. You created more joy for your neighbors and for yourselves.

I honor your abiding, your remaining, your love for God and others over the last 100 years in the town of Marblehead and your connections with St. Stephen's in Lynn and beyond. Your history of abiding will lead to your future of abiding, and God's love will be magnified in **you! Alleluia and Amen.**