



SEP 18 2023

Off

## God's Work, Our Elevators

I was invited out to two places last Sunday, September 10. I accepted both invitations months ago, and neither of the two knew the other was inviting me. What's really funny and amazing: I myself didn't put "2 and 2 together" until almost the last minute. This may be because my autumn schedule is very full; but more likely, it's because our God is full of surprises, and loves to surprise us!

In our scripture, what this reminds me of: when those two grieving disciples were on the road to Emmaus, on the Sunday afternoon/evening of Jesus's resurrection (Luke 24:13-35). As you recall, Jesus came up to them "on the way," and spent hours walking and talking with them – but they never figured out who he was. It was only at the end, in the breaking of the bread, that they could see it was Jesus – and at last they put together the whole good-news story. SURPRISE!

Anyway – my first stop last Sunday morning was to worship with the residents of Good Shepherd Home, on Schoenersville Road in Bethlehem. This is such a wonderful place. To be sure, it is a top-notch medical facility. [On the "Good Shepherd Rehabilitation" website](#), it is described as "a long-term care facility that serves 60 residents" with severe disabilities. *"Good Shepherd Home – Bethlehem is for individuals 12 years of age and older requiring residential nursing care. Primary diagnoses served include, but are not limited to, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, quadriplegia, Multiple Sclerosis,*

*traumatic brain injury and spina bifida. Each resident and his or her family are active participants in the development of their care plan.”*

This is all true – and so much more. Pastor Roxanne Kringle, the chaplain for this facility and for the larger home in Allentown, called The Raker Center, took me on a tour; and I got to see all the different spaces that make this place feel like a real home: comfortable, well-lighted, plants and pictures everywhere, and lots of caring and smiling faces. The staff and residents were fantastically welcoming and so interesting to speak to and share stories with. They even have resident “pets” – I met two orange tabby-cat brothers named Felix and Oscar who provide support and love on the floors they are allowed to roam.

The worship service at 10 a.m. was attended by 20 residents, and we were joined by some of their families who came over to worship with us. Pastor Kringle gave a powerful sermon, the hymn-singing was robust, and we all were fed and sent out to love and serve the Lord.

As the service ended, Pastor Kringle invited me to give a greeting to everyone. As I shared a bit about my work and the life of our synod – bringing greetings from all our congregations to this active and lively congregation – I began to share with them that I was heading to another congregation this afternoon, and I could bring greetings to that group from all assembled here. As I looked out on the assembly – 20 individuals in wheelchairs and wheeled beds – I said, “I am going to St. John’s Lutheran Church in Brandonville, as they bless their new...ELEVATOR.” Only in that moment, did I finally see it – the connection! SURPRISE! These people would uniquely understand and appreciate the power of elevators for homes and places of worship!

So I drove from Bethlehem, up and over to Brandonville in the western end of our synod – so excited and in awe of what God does through faithful people. I arrived to an excited group of members and guests gathered outside on that lovely Sunday afternoon – on “God’s Work, Our Hands” Sunday, no less – to bless this very generous gift from one of the founding families of St. John’s. The congregation’s hope was well expressed in the opening prayer: “We pray that our new elevator will be a blessing, especially for those who have physical limitations.”

In my remarks, I was thrilled to pass along the prayers, well-wishes and gratitude from the residents of Good Shepherd Home, all the way over in Bethlehem. This is how we are church together, and can inspire each other, by the Holy Spirit and the gifts each is given. I told them about the SURPRISE I felt, and the way God is always surprising us with love, life and connection, all along the way.

On the Way of Jesus together,

***Bishop Christopher deForest***