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Good Shepherd Episcopal Church
Rally Day 2010
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I am going off-script this morning—setting the lectionary aside. It is Rally Day and we need to rally up! This is a day for energy, enthusiasm and inspiration. It is my hope that this day will inspire our hearts and minds in a way that impacts our behavior. Some good news and some bad news lie ahead. I offer these to start.

A church treasurer comes into the priest's office and says, "I've got good news and I've got bad news." The priest says, "give me the good news first." "Okay, in June we had the largest total Sunday offering we have had in almost 3 years." "Great! What's the bad news—You were on vacation for the whole month of June."

An attorney comes in to an office where his client is sitting and says "I've got good news and I've got bad news." The client thinks for a minute and says, "you had better give me the bad news first." "Well the district attorney just called and it is definitely your blood at the crime scene. "That is awful" the man says, "but you said there is some good news"—His attorney says, "oh yeah, your cholesterol is only 150."

I have good news and bad news for you this morning. The bad news has several parts. First, you and I are in rough shape. We are stressed out and worn out. Each of us is incomplete. All of us are alienated and separated from God and God is out to get us! The good news is that God is out to get us free from unhelpful and harmful things and get us into a saving relationship with Jesus!

God's principal business is saving, delivering, healing, reconciling and reuniting. From the time of the Fall in the Garden of Eden down to this very moment God has been calling and inviting us into relationships that have the power to save us. Unfortunately, during that same time human beings have consistently found ways to ignore, avoid, thwart and disrupt God's plans and purposes.

If I asked you, "why are you here, today?" there could be as many answers/reasons as there are people present. Perhaps when you seriously think about why you are here it may be hard to put into words.

I believe that a central, significant part of why we are here is that you and I have been called here. We have been called or led (somehow) to be here. Some experience, some hope, some need for God calls and leads us. There is a deep (perhaps unconscious) longing and desire that brought you and me to this place at this time. We are here because something is missing. We are looking for something—something different, something better or something more complete. We want something to be or something to change, and we cannot do it ourselves. You and I have come to understand that at this time, for a wide variety of reasons, Good Shepherd has a part to play in what Paul describes as working out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

The true and living God has touched and informed our hearts with the Good News of Christ. Our hearts may tell us that Jesus will heal us and save us, but the human heart is prone to wander away from the voice of God and vision of God's kingdom.

These days we are bombarded with distractions and competing voice almost continually. The world seems to thrive on shrill emotional rhetoric that just upsets and polarizes people. Anxiety, fear, division and suspicion rule radio, television and the internet. We are constantly urged, shamed and even bullied about making a decision for one side or the other of some issue. Both sides attack each other and any middle ground or moderation they can find. No one really listens to anyone these days. Christians can find it hard to hear Jesus at all.

You know as well as I do that the Episcopal Church is conflicted and divided about multiple issues these days. Even if you don't have a huge stake in the disputes, that tension is there—you can feel it in the background of our life together. If we are not vigilant and committed, anxiety, fear and suspicion can become the guiding forces in the Church.

Too much of our resources, time and energy are drained off in the service of fear and anxiety management. Fear will take us down if it goes unchecked. You and I need to stop this drain on our spiritual reserve and generate some Christian passion and enthusiasm. We need to make a conscious and intentional decision for our relationship with Jesus Christ. You and I need to recommit ourselves to Jesus.

I know that talk of making a commitment to Jesus makes Episcopalians a little uncomfortable. Relax! I am not talking about an altar call, testimony or profession of faith. There is nothing wrong with those practices—just not part of our heritage. We cannot afford to throw the baby out with the bath water, though. You and I need to get over ourselves and let Jesus get all over us.

In our own way, we make a commitment to Jesus every time we come to this communion rail. We just need to be more aware of the power, importance and wonder of what we are doing and why we are doing it. We need to get our heads and hearts around the importance of getting and staying right with Jesus.

Early on in my adult Christian journey, God was scaring me. I was being filled with the Spirit. The Bible was touching my heart, I felt prayer working in my life and hearing people share their faith gave me goose bumps and tears. I was on a runaway train to glory---and all I wanted to do was put on the brakes. One day I confessed to Susan that I did not really understand what was happening. I did not think I was ready to be a Jesus freak. She came right up in my face, looked me straight in the eye, pushed her index finger into my chest and said, "Boy, you have been a freak for a whole lot worse!"

She was right, and at that time, my life was pretty much a wreck because of it. We all have choices to make in life—the bottom line spiritual choice for us is will we follow Jesus or something else. Joshua told the children of Israel to choose this day who you will serve. This choice is not a theoretical decision. A decision has to be made and then lived out in following Jesus. You and I need to decide to get over ourselves so that Jesus can get all over us!

Jesus is with us and for us. Nothing in the whole of creation can separate us from the love God in Christ Jesus. Listen to just a few of the things Jesus said to reveal the true heart of the gospel: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”

“I know my own and my own know me”

“I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete”

“Peace I leave with you, my own peace I give you”

“I have said this to you so that in me, you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world.”

Can any of us afford to let anything get in the way of those assurances? Life, joy, peace and courage are God’s will for us. To get full benefit of these gifts, our focus on Jesus needs to be strong. It needs support from every available resource. Having Christ at the center of our lives is our goal. The pursuit of this goal will require us to keep other concerns secondary to our relationship with Jesus.

Every part of our lives is filled with problems to be solved, concerns to be addressed and issues to face. It is hard not to worry, fret and stress over what is wrong. It is hard not to jump, rush and run from crisis to crisis. We can get so consumed with eliminating what is wrong we can lose sight of what is right.

The true and more glorious reality is that what is wrong, missing or lacking in our lives or our church community withers like the grass of the field when compared with what is abundantly right and good with Jesus.

It does no good to ignore real, significant problems. However, any solution we seek has to take the relationship we have with God in Christ into account. Being led by the Spirit has to win out over being driven by fear. Again, get over yourself so that Jesus can get all over you!

This parish church—our programs and ministries; the vast array of relationship between and among all of us can be the centerpiece or common ground of the work we all need to do to live Christ centered lives. Being present, being connected and being involved afford each of us a chance to work on our own relationships with God and to support others in doing the same.

There will always be problems and few solutions will be perfect. We need each other and we need this community. With eyes on the same prize, we can work toward transcending our differences and help each other along the way. Being present can put you in a position to unburden your heart, to share your pain or to inspire others with your joy. God needs you and me to share how we have seen and experienced Jesus at work in our lives. We can be Christ to others, and see Christ in others. Whenever we gather in his name, Jesus has promised to be in the midst of us.

Sharing time with people; walking a path together is no cake walk. It can be a real struggle, but it is a holy struggle. This kind of journey changes things and changes people. If we can respond when Jesus calls our names or tugs on our hearts; if we can take that leap of faith things will never be the same again. Come help us along the way and let all of us help you.

Now is the time, this is the place to which Jesus has called us. We need to rally together for an amazing journey into our life in Christ Jesus.

I close with a few verses from chapter 3 of Paul's Letter to the Philippians:

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Lord, help us to get over ourselves so that your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ can get all over us.
AMEN