**Sermon by The Rev. Pamela Hyde**

**St. Francis in the Valley Episcopal Church, Green Valley, AZ**

**October 20, 2019**

**Proper 24C/Pentecost 19**

*In you, Father all-mighty,*

*we have our preservation and our bliss.*

*In you, Christ,*

*we have our restoring and our saving.*

*You are our mother, brother, and savior.*

*In you, our Lord the Holy Spirit,*

*is marvelous and plenteous grace.*

*You are our clothing;*

*for love you wrap us and embrace us.*

*You are our maker, our lover, our keeper.*

*Teach us to believe that by your grace all shall be well,*

*and all shall be well,*

*and all manner of things shall be well. Amen.[[1]](#footnote-2)*

I have a group of rafting friends that I often used to run rivers with who wouldn’t dream of pushing off from shore at the beginning of a trip without asking “the river gods” to protect us. When all the rafts were packed up, we’d pause and gather at the shore. The trip leader would open a beer, then he’d pour a little into the river as an offering and ask the gods to watch over us and keep us safe and upright on our downstream journey. The beer would then be passed around

for each member of our group to take a sip. When it was gone, we got into our boats and began rowing downstream.

Although this little ritual was a bit irreverent and definitely pagan in tone, as a Christian I was always reminded at these times of how blessed I was to know that God does watch over us on all our journeys, even our grand journey through life. Because the Lord is our keeper, as our psalm for this morning, Psalm 121, says. He’s the source of our help, the firm ground we stand on, the one who watches over us, our preserver and our protector, and the one who *keeps* our life forever, wherever we may go. The Hebrew word for “keep” as it’s used in the psalm is *shamar*, which means to watch, guard or protect. We’re not alone on our journey, because our keeper is with us and keeps his watch over us always.

That’s incredibly comforting, isn’t it?

You all — and I — are about to embark on new journeys with plenty of unknowns. And that’s both exciting and a little bit daunting at the same time. After many months of searching, you’ve called a new rector who should be with you in a few short months to begin a new chapter with you in your life as St. Francis Church. Fr. Warren Leibovitch I know is excited to join you all and be a part of your journey as God’s people in this place. He’ll walk with you through all that awaits you, and lead you into new and joyful ways of being Christ’s heart and hands in the world, loving God and loving others. And God will keep Fr. Warren and all of you on this journey into your future, watching over you as his beloveds. Remember always to look to God for help and guidance. Ground yourself in him, trust in him, and you will never be shaken. Trust in God’s love, God’s grace, and God’s abundance. He has richly blessed St. Francis, because he’s blessed *you*, and it is *you*, my friends, who ARE St. Francis. You are this church. And you know how to love and care for each other, both inside these walls and outside of them. I’ve seen it again and again over my three years here. You’re all capable of so much love and giving of yourselves. Deep in your hearts you know that all that you’re blessed with comes from God, and that you’re only stewards of what you’ve been given. As part of this community — this family — of St. Francis, you know that you’re also stewards of the community — stewards of each other — to care for and nurture so that the community will continue to grow and thrive. Your journey continues on into a bright and exciting future with God among you to keep you and be with you wherever the journey may lead. I wish you all the best and much love for that journey.

But as you know, I’m embarking on a new journey of my own. I’ve had to hold the details of that journey in confidence, and although my new position hasn’t formally been announced, I can now tell you what it is — with the understanding that we keep it among ourselves for the time being. I’ve been called to be the new Canon for Creation Care for the Diocese of Arizona, beginning on the first of the year. For me, this is an opportunity to live into a call that’s been unfolding over decades of my life, beginning with my work as an environmental advocate, protecting rivers in the Southwest, and deepening as I answered a call to serve God’s people. I’ll be working throughout the diocese to connect people and parishes with the ways that their stories and their futures are intertwined with all that God created and to help them learn how to live more lightly on the earth as the stewards of creation. I’m very excited to do God’s work with God’s people in this way, even as I’m grieved to be leaving all of you. I’ve been blessed on my journey with you here at St. Francis. You have loved me, cared for me, and blessed me, and I thank you with all my heart. And now I’m newly blessed to be journeying into new and unknown experiences in my new call. Through it all, I abide in the knowledge that my help comes from the Lord, and that he’ll guide me, keep me, and be my rock and my strength through all the joys and the challenges. He’ll provide abundantly for the future of my ministry, just as he provides abundantly for St. Francis.

So as we all go forward into the future on our journeys, my hope is that we can hold in our hearts how richly God blesses us as he keeps us on the journey. And as we recognize all the blessings that God pours upon us, I pray that we can find our ways to respond as stewards of what we’ve been given. This community of God’s people at St. Francis is such a blessing — to you all *and* to the world. It’s in your care to nurture and sustain into the future — an unknown and exciting future. Care for it well, as it has cared for you. Consider how you can best give back to the church and to God, to be a blessing to this place and to each other. I invite you to pray about it. YOU are St. Francis, my friends. YOU make it run. YOU make it grow. YOU make it a loving and caring place, a place of joy and abundance and welcoming. YOU are the hearts and hands of Christ in the world as the people of God in Green Valley. I will miss you, and I will love you always.

I want to leave you with a Celtic prayer and blessing to carry with you on the journey:

*Lord of my heart, give me vision to inspire me,*

*that, working or resting, I may always think of you.*

*Lord of my heart, give me light to guide me,*

*that, at home or abroad, I may always walk in your way.*

*Lord of my heart, give me wisdom to direct me,*

*that, thinking or acting, I may always discern right from wrong.*

*Lord of my heart, give me courage to strengthen me,*

*that, amongst friends or enemies, I may always proclaim your justice.*

*Lord of my heart, give me trust to console me,*

*that, hungry or well-fed, I may always rely on your mercy.*

*Lord of my heart, save me from empty praise,*

*that I may always boast of you.*

*Lord of my heart, save me from worldly wealth,*

*that I may always look to the riches of Heaven.*

*Lord of my heart, save me from military prowess,*

*that I may always seek your protection.*

*Lord of my heart, save me from vain knowledge,*

*that I may always study your word.*

*Lord of my heart, save me from unnatural pleasures,*

*that I may always find joy in your wonderful creation.*

*Heart of my own heart, whatever may befall me,*

*rule over any thoughts and feelings, my words and actions.*

*Deep peace of the running water to you,*

*Deep peace of the flowing air to you,*

*Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,*

*Deep peace of the shining stars to you,*

*Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.[[2]](#footnote-3)*

God bless you and keep you all, my beloveds, now, and on your coming journey.

Amen.

1. Julian of Norwich, in *Essential Mystic Prayers* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2018) 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Celtic blessing, source unknown, in *2000 Years of Prayer* (Harrisburg: Moorehouse, 1999), 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)