

Message for 6-28-26
 Shared by Rev. Ken Heintzelman

I must begin my final message with words from my father. *Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.*

I was fortunate to take my introduction to the Old Testament under Professor Walter Harrelson. He was a brilliant scholar and a gracious human being. I remember when he gave us our first written assignment, he said we could end it with a scholarly whimper or an extravagant, brilliant flourish. It did not matter to him, but it needed to be on time. Today, I am presenting my last message with neither scholarship nor brilliance. I am bringing it to you with gratitude and brevity.

I am grateful that after 18 years of trying, last week I finally got one right. This is no joke today because I think I should quit while I am ahead.

I am grateful to the clergy who founded Shadow Rock and served before me. I reaped where they have sown.

I am grateful to everyone who has been part of Shadow Rock, and to you for my ministry with you. I did nothing on my own, and sometimes my best work was getting out of the way. Lois, thank you for all of your work and for the grace you gave me. Heidi, thank you for being the CKO, the Chief Know Officer, and that is spelled K-N-O-W.

I ask forgiveness of those of you I have hurt and neglected. I am sorry, and if we need to talk beyond today, I am ready to listen, especially if it leads to healing and reconciliation.

When Peg and I began the youth ministry in 1979, I did not know the word "sanctuary" would become so important to my ministry. It absolutely is, but not for the reason you may think. When I attended meetings, led prayer vigils in front of government buildings, stayed the night with refugees, drove them to the bus station in the middle of the night, traveled distances to provide assistance to migrants, responded to late-night calls, stayed at the hospital, and all the other things that go with being a shepherd, my family gave up something of themselves and me, so I could do what I felt called to do. I could not do what I did or be who I am without them. Not only did they sacrifice, which is kind of passive, but Peg actively and intentionally gave me "sanctuary". In our first church in Crofton, Kentucky, when I experienced one of those pinch moments of conflict, she wrote me a letter. She said, "Love them like the husband you are to me." I carry the letter with me everywhere I serve. It is in a plastic sleeve for protection, and I keep it on my desk.

In every place we lived and served, Peg made us a home. She was the emotional glue that held us together. She gave me a place to rest and arms to find solace. She was my quiet place and refuge for renewing my strength. I see you, wife. I thank you, and I want everyone to know what you did for them and for me.

Finally, I leave you with a story about the apostle John. John was the disciple said to be Jesus' beloved disciple and lived into old age. John was to come to a new church and give a message. He was the last living disciple of Jesus, so everyone was excited to see him and hear him. A great crowd gathered inside and flowed to the outside of the church. He was old and fragile. They carried him in because they were not handicapped accessible. They set him on the chancel. The crowd started to shush each other to quietness so they could hear him speak. It finally got very quiet. They leaned in. They heard his strong but quiet voice say with conviction, "Little children, love one another." "Little children, love one another." "Little children, love one another." The people began to look at each other, wondering if that was all he was going to say. They wondered if John had become a senile old man, and this was all he had to say. Some people, however, understood this was the only commandment that Jesus gave, and if we do this thing, love one another, it is more than sufficient. Now, you decide. Was he a rambling, senile old man, or is it a Word About Life, that when lived, is sufficient? I hope it is sufficient. Thank you for everything. Amen.