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## *You Shine Like the Sun*

**A sermon by the Rev. Canon Cathy Zappa**  
**The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 15, Year B**

My family has a tradition—well, to be more accurate, *I* have a tradition—of taking the children’s pictures at the front door as they leave for the first day of school. The family tradition has been to groan about it and tell me to “hurry up!” “You’re being annoying!” Apparently, I had some success anyway, because recently I was looking at these pictures again. And so many other memories came into view, and I found myself marveling: my, how my children had changed from year to year.

It was so obvious, looking at those yearly snapshots all together, but so easy to miss in the day-to-day back then, when I’d been so worried that my sweet seven-year-old would never stop screaming “bloody murder” out the school-bus window as it pulled away. Or that my middle-school son would insist on gym shorts every day, even in twenty-degree weather, for the rest of his life. Or that my youngest daughter would never, ever give up her pet pickle.

Oh, how I had worried and even despaired! Now, looking back, I could see. I could see how much had been happening all along the way, how they’d been growing and changing day-by-day. And I, with them.

Many of our children have stood on similar thresholds this month, crossing over into a new grade or school, or college or job. I suspect that many of the parents here have taken similar “first-day” pictures (or wanted to!), because no matter how old our children are, their new chapters mark new chapters for us, too.

Some of you are becoming parents, or grandparents. Some are getting married. Congratulations! Some of you are grieving the loss of a loved one, a relationship, an ailment-free body, or a former way of life. And that can be really hard and scary.

But we don’t cross any of these thresholds alone. Our tradition, our sacred stories and liturgies, they contain deep wisdom for people making the passage from one place or time or identity to another. They remind us that a big part of what we do as church is accompany one another through the changes and chances of this life. And we mark these thresholds as sacred, with baptisms and confirmations, weddings, funerals, and blessings of all kinds. We blessed graduates in May, at the end of the last school year; and you will bless backpacks later today for the new year!

Here at the Cathedral, we are standing on another threshold, with summer drawing to a close and our program year gearing up. We have had some changes here, too, among our staff: earlier this summer, our beloved Director of Children’s Ministries, Lisa McNamara, moved to Maine to run a bed and breakfast. (Many of us want to go with her!) Our beloved Organist and Associate Choirmaster, Caroline Robinson, accepted a new position at the University of Michigan. Our beloved Canon Lauren Holder is moving to Maryland for a new call, after her sabbatical. And while some of us (like yours truly) were weeping and wailing, Lynn Wilmoth became our new director of Children’s Ministries, and Chase Loomer our new Organist and Associate Choirmaster, and they are already blessing us! And you are already blessing them!

Now, I am giving my last sermon here before I, too, am sent off, to be the interim rector of Christ Church, Savannah. (Yes, I’m bucking the trend of moving north!) And this, what we’re doing today: it’s a ritual, too. A rite of passage. And I’m grateful for it. Not because it has been an easy sermon. On the contrary, this is the hardest sermon I’ve ever written or delivered (and I’ve had some doozies). But today, I wish my heart could speak to you directly. Words just aren’t enough.

No, I'm grateful for it because of what I can see from here: *You*. I am grateful for it because I am grateful for *you*, and I'm grateful for the chance to say that. I'm grateful for these rituals' nudge to pause and feel and remember, with you. To review so many snapshots and stories from the last ten years that have made us laugh and cry and helped me see how much we have grown, together. How you have grown and changed me. How you tolerated me when I was a brand-new priest here, fumbling around and making mistakes left and right. I know what you're thinking: I still make mistakes left and right! The difference is that now I know your grace. You have graced me and even loved me into being a priest, and a fuller human being. You have shown me what church can be; and now you are showing me how to say goodbye, with your characteristic grace and beauty. What beauty!

I really don't want this to be about me. It is about God and you and us. It's about what God does through people like us. But I *do* want you to see what I see: a holy people. A priestly people. A beautiful "sacred community," as Dean Candler said in his sermon last Sunday. I see so many saints, present and past, who have blessed this church, and me, with your presence, prayers, tears and longings and wonderings and so many gifts. I see how God has been at work, all along, in all of it, from the most glorious Easter celebration to the most tedious meeting: giving us life, making us new, making us one.

It's simply stunning. You are stunning! And what I see so clearly today, which is also stunning, is that this has been there all along. All these blessings, all this grace and goodness and gratitude and love and beauty: they have been here all along. And they, too, have grown along the way.

In fact, it may be precisely because it's all so stunning, so stop-in-your-tracks-and-fall-on-your-knees humbling and awe-inspiring, that we don't really take all this in, all the time. It may be that we so rarely let ourselves really feel how deeply we love and are loved because it would be overwhelming.

The Trappist monk Thomas Merton describes being similarly overwhelmed, standing at a busy intersection in a busy shopping district. "I was suddenly overwhelmed," he recalls, "with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another." He continues: "If only everybody could realize this! But...there is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.... If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time."

I wonder if that is what Paul is getting at in Ephesians, when he talks about "giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." I don't think he is saying, "Grin and bear it no matter what. Always look on the bright side of life. Conjure something to give thanks for when all you want to do is cry." No, today, at least, I hear him saying, "Remember! Remember this gratitude, this blessing, this awe, at all times and in everything. Remember what you know to be true in moments like this, when you see so clearly how good God is. When you see so clearly how beautiful the people around you are, and you just have to tell them that they are walking around shining like the sun.

Friends, you shine like the sun.

Thresholds, changes, and the rituals that accompany them: they help us see. They remind us that people are holy. Time is holy. God is with us, always and ever. They draw us into celebration—showing up for each other and singing and giving thanks and praising God and blessing, blessing, blessing, blessing. Practices that are not just for endings, but for all our days.

Every day is a good day to remember. To say thank you. I love you. Every day is a good day for blessing. And you are a blessing people, and a blessed people. Dean Candler has led us in being a blessing church.

So thank you. Thank you for your blessing. Thank you for sharing your life with me, and letting me share mine with you.

May God continue to bless you, and to bless others through you.