

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP “Christ Be our Light” ONE VERSE (Handout)

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 18:15-20 (NRSV)

¹⁵ “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶ But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

HYMN AFTER SCRIPTURE: “Come, We That Love the Lord” (#23)

SERMON

Ok friends, we’ve talked about finding answering the question “who do you say that I am” in a few sentences or less, so that it can be efficiently engaged and practices. We called that the “WHO”...

We’ve talked about the things that burden us on our journeys, the things that block our view toward seeing the path clearly (the leaves on the windshield, the ice on the wipers) We called that the “WHAT”--

--So...notice that the “WHAT” was “what keeps us from following the path” not “what are we supposed to be doing?” Because that second one—the “what are we supposed to be doing” will change, day by day, experience by experience, as varied as times of your life or your interests and hobbies at any given time or as varied as your choice of words in conversations with others—

--friends, when you accept Jesus into your heart, God doesn’t put blinders on you and sends you forward, quite the opposite—accepting Jesus into your heart is the time when God takes the blinders off so that you can see all around you.

That’s how Jesus walked this earth. As I’ve said before, he didn’t just sit in the temple and say “obey,” he walked amongst the people...and said “welcome”

And he still does. I believe that, with my whole heart. He's in every one of our interactions, our experiences...saying "welcome"

So here's my question: are we acknowledging that "welcome"?

So we got the "who do you say that I am" and we got the "what's in the way from following the Christian path"

Today we have the "How"—how do we hear and receive and respond to the "welcome" we hear in Jesus. How do we respond to having the blinders taken off and seeing and receiving and responding to all around us echoing Jesus's welcome?

Scripture today is about resolving disputes, it is about reconciliation in separateness, it is about... welcome.

But behind those words of resolution and reconciliation, there's a sentiment that Jesus is expressing. Jesus said "if two or more agree, God has got your back" and "when two or more are gathered, I am there among you"

Jesus is telling us that there are more important things to focus on than messing around with the little disputes.

Sometimes people in churches...get fussy...especially churches in a time of stagnancy of spirit, stuck in routine and tradition—I picture kids in the back seat of a car on a road trip and "he's touching me!" "tell him to stop!" (it was all my siblings fault, I was perfect)

We fuss like that in churches, all churches have it. Because stagnancy and repetition bores us—just like those kids in the car.

The cure for it? Have something more important to focus on that makes all those little things seem as trivial.

New things are arriving all the time... let's put it this way: every group or gathering of people has a normative behavior. When people come to your table there are ways you expect them to behave. And that differs in different homes. Some set the table and wait on guests, some say "here's the food, dish up, need something, it's in the fridge" —some are on their best behavior and some are casual and joking. But a norm is set...

But that's just for perspective...this extends much larger—ways we are accustomed to, ways we expect things to be.

How does that happen in Churches? What are we accustomed to? What are ways that we expect things to be?

How does that happen in communities, Morgan Park for example? What are we accustomed to? What are the ways that we expect things to be?
 How does this happen as a nation? What are we accustomed to? What are the ways we expect things to be?

And then somebody, or a group of people come along that...do things a little differently. They have different ideas. They've lived a different life and arrived at different conclusions and practices in everyday life.

How does that group respond? Do we say "nope, THIS is the way we do things"

I used that "table" metaphor. Today, the table is set in church, and Jesus is our host. What are Jesus's expectations of us in our table fellowship?

What I can do is appreciate his ministry. In our Gospel story, who are the ones that said "nope, THIS is the way we do things"—who was it that came in with a different idea, different life, different conclusion and practice.

If anyone ever hosted a table where the common ethic is "welcome something new" it is Jesus.

So I ask again: "How do we welcome something new?" How do we take off the blinders and the fuss engendered by boredom and repetition. How do we meet something or someone that is new and different? We take our blinders off, and instead of saying "nope, this is the way we've always done it" we... *open our minds and get creative.*

Look at this time, we can't gather the way we used to, and our response, by and large, has been to stop gathering, especially for fellowship and friendship.

You know, Lean times happen in churches, and this time has certainly triggered one... lean times...financially lean times to be certain, but the healthiest of churches work their budgets every year to "break even" (by my observation, resting on the laurels of endowments is a recipe for decline)—we are used to adjusting and re-adjusting to the present circumstances.

But there's another type of leanness that concerns me much more--Times of lean communal spirit, of people working independently, disconnected. That's my real covid concern...one cleans, one mows the lawn, one decorates, one makes music, and nary the four of them shall meet. That's concerning. That's not church. That's a building. That's maintenance.

How do we adjust? I think in exploring how we continue to be church, we will find our creativity. And that same spirit of open-minded creativity is how we approach all things new and different.

I wrote in this month's newsletter:

When we plan things in the church, our instinct is to invite and include everyone, and gather as many people as possible in one place. Well, that's one way to make a church feel like beehive, but the other is to plan smaller groups, intentionally limited for safety, and have the church buzzing with different people doing different things. It's a new and different way of looking at church activity, but this is a new and different time we're living in.

GROUP DISCUSSION

So...(STEP AWAY) How can we do what we are called to do, here in this church, in this time? How can we be church?

HYMN AFTER SERMON: "A Pilgrim Was I and A-wandering" (#49)

SHARING COMMUNION TOGETHER

- "All are welcome"

- Come forward, honoring space, take it back to your seat and eat when you feel ready.

SOLO DURING COMMUNION

JOYS AND CONCERNS

- thanks to Mike and Marna Fastland for decorating.

- moving crew?

- Monday Bible Study will be cancelled for Labor Day

- Produce Giveaway moved to Wednesday. Location either here or Iron Mug.

PASTORAL PRAYER

LORDS PRAYER

CLOSING HYMN: "Is Your Burden Heavy?" #426

BENEDICTION / DISTRIBUTION OF WIPES