

Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church

Pentecost 4, Proper 8, June 28, 2020

READINGS:

Jeremiah 28:5-9

Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18

Romans 6:12-23

Matthew 10:40-42

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The long, green season after the Day of Pentecost in our church calendar is the season of our life as followers of Jesus, right now, in our time, and in our place. The season IS the longest in the church calendar.

Patricia B. Buckland says in her book *Advent to Pentecost: a history of the church year*, that Pentecost season is "dedicated to translating the concepts of our faith into practice in the daily routines of living".

Maybe THAT is why Pentecost is a long season! We need that time to wrestle with questions we have about following Jesus:

What does it mean to live as a Christian?

How do we do that in the world we live in now?

What happens if we do?

What happens if we don't?

Since the Day of Pentecost on May 31, our readings from Matthew's Gospel have been giving us some answers to our questions. Matthew tells us we are to follow the apostles into the

world. We are to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed. We are to work in the fields that are ready to harvest, and to pray for more workers.

Today, he tells us we are to be "welcomers".

In our three-verse reading from Matthew's Gospel today, Jesus uses the word "welcome" SIX TIMES!

"Jesus said, 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.'"

When we welcome other people, we welcome God!

If we think about it, the Bible is full of stories of welcome for strangers - big welcomes and small ones. Abraham once almost dragged some passing strangers into his tent so he could offer them a meal. A widow gave the last of her oil and flour to feed a prophet sent to her by God. Jesus fed a crowd of 5,000 with a little boy's lunch basket of bread and fish.

In fact, during his ministry on earth, Jesus was always rescuing lost people, forgiving sinners, consoling hurt people, welcoming strangers, healing divisions, refreshing exhausted people, and freeing captives. Jesus was, and is, all about welcome, and freedom, and life!

"Follow me", he told his apostles, "And I will make you fish for people". But, he didn't MAKE them follow. He didn't MAKE them do what he did. He gave them a choice - to follow, or not to follow.

Saint Paul tells us in today's reading from his letter to the Romans that as Christians we have the same choice to make about how we live our lives. We have the freedom to choose behaviors that lead to death, or behaviors that are life-giving, for us and for other people.

If we choose, we can do the things Jesus did. We can feed people. We can bring healing to people stricken by personal tragedy or natural disaster. We can teach. We can welcome the stranger and nurture our children.

We can offer a cup of cold water to someone who is really thirsty, and for whom a cup of water is a "big deal".

Someone like a field archaeologist working in the desert summer, for example!

Once my husband Bob was working on a project near Las Vegas in the summertime. He had to hike in about six miles from his truck to the job site. So, he dropped off extra canteens of water as he walked in at dawn to drink on the hike back in the afternoon. One of the canteens

had a cover that wicked some of the water up to keep it cool. When Bob hiked out, he found that a hive of bees had discovered his water stash. They were happily drinking from the damp canteen cover. He is sensitive to bee stings, but he needed that water so badly that he braved the bees, grabbed the canteen, and ran for it! He still isn't sure how far those thirsty bees chased him before they gave up! So, a drink of water CAN be a "big deal", depending on someone's circumstances.

We can be people of unification. We can be people of inclusion. We can bring people in, not shut them out.

We can be the people with a HUGE welcome mat always displayed at our doors!

Small welcomes. Little things done in love. These things are IMPORTANT, Jesus says, even eternally significant. Those who welcome will never lose their reward!

There is a prayer for the night from the New Zealand Prayer Book that I love. It ends with this petition:

"The night heralds the dawn. Let us look EXPECTANTLY to a new day, new joys, new possibilities".

Christian people are called to be welcoming, for in welcoming others we welcome God.

When we welcome other people, we welcome God!

As the apostles of our time, as the "Welcomers" for God's Kingdom, we can choose to expect that each dawn in the long, green season of Pentecost WILL bring us new joys. Each dawn WILL bring us new possibilities for translating the concepts of our faith into practice in the routines of daily living!

So, how do we become "Welcomers" for our Lord?

Every day, just look to see who is in need, and DO SOMETHING!

Sweep off those welcome mats! Fill those cups of cold water!

Let Jesus do the rest!

Amen.