

Sermon for June 29, 2008

Readings: Romans 6:12-14; Matthew 10:40-42

Rev. Curt Anderson

"Doing our part"

Jesus is sending out the disciples on their first preaching and teaching mission. The text that Janet read, which began: *Whoever welcomes you welcomes me ...* is the end of his preparing them for that mission.

He has been teaching them for sometime. One of his prime pieces of teaching is the Sermon on the Mount. We tend to think of a crowd on the mountain that day; but according to the gospel, those words of teaching were specifically for the disciples – the crowds listened in and overheard.

In that Sermon, he says some beautiful words; among them, these: *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.... Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.*

In his last speech of preparation to them, he says some thoughtful things: *I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*

In the same speech, he also says some provocative things: *I have come not to bring peace, but a sword, to set son against father and daughter against mother.* (If you were here last week, you know how much I **struggle** with those words.)

And after all his teaching and preparation, his last words to them begin with this – *Whoever welcomes you welcomes me.*

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me. What a profound thought ... and what an awesome responsibility. Those disciples were not going out as Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John, Matthew the tax collector and Judas the betrayer. No.

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me.

First and foremost, they were going out as representatives of Jesus Christ. The world would learn who Jesus was through them. The coming of the Christ, the Messiah, would be embodied in the mission of those disciples.

As the modern-day disciples of Christ, the same glorious opportunity and tremendous responsibility are also ours. When we call ourselves Christians, everything we say and do is a presentation of Jesus, to the people we know and meet and interact with, everyday.

A simple “*Hello, may I help you,*” said to the right person at the right time, may literally bring hope to a person in despair. On the other hand, a thoughtless arrogance or a condescending remark could literally turn a person off to Jesus, for a very long time.

When people welcome us into their lives, they risk a certain vulnerability, and they offer us a tremendous opportunity.

They have opened themselves to Jesus Christ through us. What will we say? How will we act? Will the **real Christ** be known through us; or will it be some **monstrous imposter** teaching hatred, violence, intolerance of others, indifference to suffering?

That is a decision we make each time we approach another person.

We signed a Covenant with Dane Co. HFH today. In part, what we are doing is promising to fulfill Jesus words, *I was a stranger and you welcomed me.* There are

people who are strangers to decent and affordable housing. We have promised to welcome one of those people – whoever it is HFH chooses – into a better place to live: a place where life might become renewed and filled with hope.

We have promised to share the love and blessings of Jesus Christ with that family, just as we did a year ago, with Julie Brooks-Hall and her children.

And in so doing, we have promised to show the reality and presence of Jesus Christ to all the people of our lives.

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me. That is the opportunity we have.

When we leave here, we do not leave as Carol the consultant or Joe the labor organizer, Dreena the teacher or Larry the University housing coordinator, Jane the retired bookstore owner and church organist or Sara the mom and homemaker.

We all leave here as representatives of Jesus Christ. Whenever people welcome us into their lives, in however deep or superficial a way – by our words and actions, we show them who Jesus Christ is.

Let us all be aware of that as we leave this place today, and as we live each day of our lives.

Jesus said: *Whoever welcomes you welcomes me.* Amen.