

# Sermon: Pentecost 6

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July 21, 2019

Year C  
Genesis 18:1-10a  
Psalm 15  
Colossians 1:15-28  
Luke 10:38-42

As I think about how today's scriptures... apply to today's world... two themes rise up above the rest... themes of hospitality... and of listening to God... Jesus... and the Holy Spirit...

In the Jewish scripture reading... Abraham and Sarah welcome God in the form of three men... perhaps foreshadowing the Trinity... and Abraham is hospitable... he brings water so they can wash their feet... and a little bread... and fresh cakes... and a young calf... and curds and milk... a hospitable meal... but not a kosher one... those dietary laws came later... then they said to Abraham... perhaps in unison... *where is your wife Sarah*... so if this wasn't God speaking... but just three strangers... then how did they know Sarah's name... and connected somehow to this hospitality... was the revelation that God would return in due season... and Sarah would bear a son...

The word hospital originates from the Latin *hospes*... meaning stranger or guest... it's the root of words such as hospice... hostel... hotel... and hospitality... and the word patient comes from *patior*... which is to suffer... so a hospital can be interpreted... as a place where strangers who suffer come to be cared for... and there's a plaque... near the old Cook County Hospital in Chicago... and on it... is a quote by French scientist Louis Pasteur... it reads... *One doesn't ask of one who suffers... what is your country... and what is your religion... one merely says... you suffer... this is enough for me... you belong to me... and I shall help you...*

Did you notice that in the first verse of today's Gospel... we're told that Martha welcomed Jesus into her home... a man didn't welcome Jesus into his home... but a

woman did... and there was... at least for a time... the legal allowance that a single woman... might own property... so this was Martha's home... she was being hospitable... and it's not clear whether Mary and Lazarus lived there too... perhaps there was some other arrangement that the text just doesn't describe... and in her hospitality... we can imagine Martha... perhaps instructing servants... or perhaps preparing the meal by herself... and setting the table... and so on... while Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to what he said... but either way... we know... that hosting guests can be a lot of work... and in our more egalitarian days... these preparations are often shared by those in the household... but in the New Revised Standard Version translation of the text... Jesus tells Martha... that Mary has chosen the better part... and our minds race to judgement... Martha bad... Mary good... but there is no such distinction in the Greek... the Greek word ἀγαθὴν (a-ga-phane) simply means good... or beneficial... it is good to be hospitable to strangers... as Abraham and Sarah were... and it is good to listen to the Word of God... as Mary did... so I don't think it's either / or... but both / and...

And when we welcome others into our homes... several things happen... we become willing to be vulnerable... to let others see how we live... to experience that rhythms of our lives... to browse our bookshelves... to see if there are any dust bunnies hiding underneath whatever... maybe even look in our medicine cabinet... and perhaps most importantly... to be willing to be changed by them... and we can ask... are we willing to be as hospitable with each other... as the Creator... Redeemer... and Sustainer are... with each other... are we willing to reflect the natural hospitality... of the Holy Trinity... maybe not perfectly... but are we willing to try... because for some people... hospitality is the difference between life and death...

There is a crisis at our southern border... mothers are trying to save their children from violent gangs... some are reaping the seeds that were sown by American interference in Central American politics... some are saying... if you don't like what's going on in America... then go back to your own country... and in the din of it all... in the chaos of it

all... we get so caught up in the details... that we lose track of what God is doing in response to the life... death... and resurrection of Jesus... and we fail to hear God's Word...

On July 1... in response to the issue of truth and fake news... ELCA Presiding Bp. Elizabeth Eaton said... in baptism... God has claimed us as beloved children joined to the death and resurrection of Christ... sealed by the Spirit... and marked with the cross of Christ forever.... baptism makes a difference and makes us different... we now belong to the Truth... that doesn't mean we have the Truth... or even know everything about truth... the Truth doesn't belong to us... no... by God's gracious act we belong to the Truth... we don't make truth claims... Truth claims us... and her prayer... is that God brings us to a place of stillness... so we can hear God's Word... as Mary did...

And on Monday... Presiding Bp. Michael Curry said... It goes without saying that there is a humanitarian crisis at the southern border of the United States. It is a human crisis... a crisis that has deep and complex roots... sources... and origins... there is suffering and there is hardship... there is complexity and difficulty... but it is a crisis that we as nation... that we as a global community... must face and find a way forward for the sake of our brothers and our sisters... for the sake of us all...

Deeply embedded in the Christian faith... indeed deeply embedded in the Jewish tradition... which is the mother of the Christian faith... and deeply embedded in the faith and traditions and values of many of the world's great religions... is a profound conviction that care for the stranger... the alien... the visitor... is a sacred duty... a sacred vow...

The book of Deuteronomy says you shall love the stranger... for remember you were once strangers in the land of Egypt... in the 25th chapter of Matthew... in the parable of the last judgment... Jesus says that when you welcomed the stranger... when you did it to these who are members of my family... you have done it to me... welcoming the

stranger... welcoming those who are visiting among us is a cardinal virtue in our Christian faith...

And in the passage about The Good Samaritan... the lawyer asked... *Well... can we define neighbor more precisely?* ... and we know he was just trying to pare down the field... and that's when Jesus told how one person helped another person... a person who was completely unlike them... someone that person considered other... not my tribe... not my nationality... not my religion... not even my friend...

Some of our neighbors are at the border... and some are those who have immigrated to this country... and are living right in our neighborhood or in our city... to show compassion to them is to obey Jesus...

Episcopal Bp. and Native American... Steven Charleston said... no person of European ancestry can claim to be an owner of this land... except by right of conquest... which is what this recent spectacle is really all about... it is not about who is a real American... since only a handful of us can make that claim legitimately... but about who dominates... who has the power... it is about control as much as it is about color... the same tragic need to exercise power over others through racism that fueled white colonialism... is still alive and well... and seeking to control everything around it...

We may have our own localized rationales for minimizing parts of... or all of... what our presiding bishops... and other bishops have said... there may be circumstances in our lives from which we benefit... or from which our country benefits... but which have come about through egregious injustices like American slavery... and which would seem to us... like an injustice to reverse... but these leaders help move our vision from myopic... to far-sighted... they help remind us Christian Americans about what the Gospel message really means...

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