

#31 10-11

Welcoming the Mystery

Genesis 22:1-14

Psalms 13

Romans 6:12-23

Matthew 10:40-42

40“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.
41Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever
welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the
righteous; 42and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a
disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

The freshman year in my college in Kentucky, which was 3 hours away from Dayton Ohio, where I lived since I was 7 years old, my parents packed up their VW bus and headed south to avoid any more snowy winters like they had lived through in 1976-77. They didn’t know where they were going to live at first. Their youngest had gone away to college and they were ready to live life and go on an adventure. So when they ended up settling in Florida it was at first exciting. But over the years it lost its charm for me, and working long hours without pay for my father during the summer heat somehow lost its thrill for me. So I did everything I could to stay in Kentucky after my Junior year in college.

At some point in time, about 2 years after I had graduated from college, while I was still trying to figure out what I was going to be when I grew up, I thought it might be a good thing to go back to Florida and live with my family until I knew where I was headed.

It turned out to not be such a great idea and I was soon praying for guidance as to what I should do next – should I stay in Florida or return to Kentucky? So I took my bible to the beach and opened up my bible to a random page, opened my eyes and read what was there. And my eyes came to Matthew 10 – the 6 verses before our Gospel text for today:

34“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 36and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household 37Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

So I returned to a still unknown future in Kentucky; where I eventually followed my calling into the ministry.

One of the overwhelming reasons that I knew I had skills for the ministry was because of the years I had spent working for my father in his restaurant, and because of the words of our sermon text today. Working in a restaurant you come to realize pretty quickly that serving and welcoming people is a mystical experience. If you can make people feel relaxed and at home in your restaurant – they will forgive a multitude of mess ups – and return time and time again – and what is more - they become like family.

And isn’t that what Christ was all about? Creating a family of God amongst all of humanity? Becoming your own strong spiritual self and continue to create welcome members of God’s family as you go on in life?

As precious and vital as strong family ties can be – the ability to take that foundation and expand the love and grace of God calls us to go beyond our blood line only. That is why it seems as though Jesus

is cutting the ties with the birth family in one section of his talk and then creating new ties with the next.

Hospitality and welcoming the stranger has always been a vital teaching of the children of Abraham. It is the foundation of a sane culture of trust. How can anyone expect to receive help when *they* are in need, if the society around them is founded on fear and mistrust? So in spite of the possible dangers of opening up and being vulnerable to the abuse of strangers, the ancient cultures had to support the ideals of unconditional hospitality.

And besides communities had to live and bargain with each other in order to survive more than we do today. We can live much more insular lives with our cars and stores and now even online shopping! People can rather easily survive today with rarely ever coming into contact with another human being. And that ability to be insular seems to only all the more propagate the myth that we cannot and do not have to trust the strangers.

Where can anyone get the faith to continue to trust and make welcome the stranger is a mystery – but such is the life of the faithful – trusting in the mystery.

Each new soul that we meet each day is a mystery, and we can never be sure what will evolve when we open ourselves up to each spirit. And Christ is telling us to welcome the mystery.

It can be difficult to open ourselves up to others. One of the first difficulties is accepting the possibility that someone else might have some information that we could benefit from. We all have a tendency to not to want to be made to feel weak and small by discovering the areas in our lives where we are perhaps ignorant. Human nature seems to want to hide all our weak spots and give a show of total self-sufficiency. So Jesus' ministry has been one of encouraging those who felt it – to accept their call – and to teach those who are faithful to trust and be open to the possibility that the divine is unfolding itself everyday through welcoming the mystery.

So what could be the prophet's reward or the righteous one's reward? Prophets are ones who reveal the truth about humanity and their relationship to the divine, and the nature of the divine. So the reward of welcoming a prophet – is a boundless opening of horizons and awarenesses about the divine.

And a righteous person's reward? The righteous can see clearly what the noble path is – which solution to work towards as a result of a clear vision of justice. The reward of those who welcome the righteous is justice and truth.

As we witness the struggles of humanity in history in dealing with prophecies of righteousness we are aware of how hard the struggle seemed to be at first and how clearly we can see the truth long after the fact.

For example – very few would struggle today with the issues of child labor laws, women's right to vote, the freeing of the slaves . . . and yet at each juncture these were debated issues. Now we look back and see that these truths have been waiting dormant under our yet to be uncovered human weaknesses of lack of knowledge, fear and limitations of love. As my Uncle Bryan, an Anglican priest in NY said about the new marriage equality law which passed there recently, "God's truth exists waiting for us to 'discover' it."

And this is what reward one gets when one welcomes the mystery of life – we are revealed God's truth, granted greater knowledge – empowered to overcome fear and our ability to love is expanded.

Amen