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Grace and Holy Trinity Church
Mark 6:1-13
July 8 2018

[Today we are welcoming a new member into the body of Christ, the Church. Maddox, hello sweet child. We are so glad you will be joining the family of Jesus Christ today. It is a good and joyful thing to celebrate the rebirth of this our brother in the sacrament of baptism. You will be marked as Christ's own forever and commissioned to go into the world with the Spirit's gifts to empower us for the gifts of ministry.]

Today I invite us to us consider [the gift of ministry commonly called hospitality], what does it mean to be hospitable, to welcome the ministers of the church, the baptized, and to provide a space "to stay until [we] leave this place." When Jesus sent his disciples out two

by two he sent them with nothing more than the clothes on their back, not even an extra tunic. They were sent out—to paraphrase Scarlett O'Hara—to rely on the kindness of strangers. But Jesus also gave them the instruction to leave if they were not welcomed, and to shake the dust off their feet. This message came right on the heels of being told that what he teaches and what he professed was falling on deaf ears in his hometown.

These two themes I believe are intrinsically linked—being judged and being welcomed. As Christians it is essential that we consider, prayerfully and intentionally, How we welcome one another and participate in the sacramental life of the Church together in essence answering the questions found in the baptismal covenant regarding how we join together in the apostles teaching, preaching, fellowship.

One way that we can answer this question is how do we live in a community where people feel safe, secure and supported through all the changes and chances of this life? How are we in other words hospitable? This being one of the gifts of ministry that we might embody as the community which is Grace and Holy Trinity Church, a place which aims to be “an inclusive, spirited, and Christ-centered urban church community that transforms lives.”

Often times when I think about this passage of scripture as a priest in the church I cast myself in the role of the disciples. As a priest in the church who is vocationally yolked to other priests in the church—both here where I serve as the associate clergy person to Bo, the rector, but also in my personal life where I am married to Andrew, the rector of The Church of the Epiphany in Lakeside. I totally get the being sent out two by two. But I have to admit, having served in my home diocese, sometimes it felt like I couldn't

preach fully in my hometown, because people knew and loved me as a lay person, but couldn't or wouldn't hear me as a priest.

So, I struggled to find my voice in Bethlehem, and felt like I was constantly trying to come out from the shadows of my husband, or my mother, my sister in law or my mother in law and my father in law as all these other people who were very active in my “home” diocese. When this reading came up in the Revised Common Lectionary, three years ago (as I was preparing to move to Richmond) I easily slipped into the role of saying it is time to shake the dust from my feet and go. But this time, six years into my ordained ministry, I heard the reading differently.

It is probably contextual, I am not in my hometown now, far from it actually, and the dust has settled mostly. But as a still a relative newcomer to Richmond and the Diocese of Virginia, sometimes I feel like I

understand you all, and other times I feel like a stranger in a strange land. But I also feel at home here, in this place, and I want to make sure that other people feel at home here.

It is part of the ministry of Hospitality, Healing and Wholeness that we offer at the Red Door Ministries that feeds bodies, souls, minds and spirits every week that reminds me that we are called to stay in a place until we leave, and what that means is that we need to remember that the Church is called to be a space of sanctuary—a space of radical welcome. Welcoming people who we know, and who we don't know, people who we recognize ourselves in and people who seem to be our complete opposite. But what does radical welcome look like? Is it the same as this “southern hospitality” or is it something different?

Let us imagine you were hosting someone overnight in your home, say a friend of a college-aged child. In the morning, you prepared breakfast bacon, eggs, home fries,

fruit salad, coffee, fresh squeezed orange juice. The perfect Saturday morning spread, right? You all sit down for the morning meal and your guest says quietly sipping their coffee and nibbling on fruit, that they are not much of a breakfast person. They politely excuse themselves from the table to prepare for the day. Once they are out of earshot you grumble to your child—I did all this work, I made all this food and that was incredibly rude of them not to even eat an egg. At this moment, your child gently reminds you that their friend is Jewish and vegan so even though you worked hard on the meal but it wasn't exactly the most appropriate option for them.

As a community of believers, we can sometimes get confused about why we do what we do and how we do it. While we certainly have a long history of traditions both in liturgy and community we need to remember that the Church is not the same as other social institutions: we are not a club, or

school, or nonprofit organization. The Church (all its denominations, congregations and interpretations) is meant to be the Body of Christ in the world, a place where followers of Christ come to to be fed spiritually, physically, and emotionally so we can go into the places where what we believe is not welcomed, but judged, and where we can be separated out as different, as other, as less than because of what we profess to be true.

This is what it means to be a Christian. We are part of a community which believes that there is “one Body and one Spirit;... one hope in God’s call to us; One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism; One God and Father of all” this is counter cultural to a world that believes that there is not One but Many, that there is no God, and that the pursuit of Happiness is the ultimate goal. We gather together to allow for Holy Spaces where we can rest and be renewed and be reconciled one to another and to God Almighty. We say prayers and

practice the sacraments so that we can be a living memory of the Glory of God, we are living scripture.

We by our Christian nature, however, are not like other people, even though externally we are subject to the standards of those closest to us, those with whom we associate families, friends and neighbors. In reality we are only judged with justice and mercy by God and God alone. In this way, because what we profess as truth and what the world professes as truth are at odds to say the least, we are not so different from Jesus. Jesus who when he returned to Nazareth and tried to preach and teach about the Kingdom of God, was asked, aren’t you Mary’s son? Aren’t your brothers and sisters here amongst us? How dare you try to teach us. In this way the world hasn’t changed as much as we imagine it has in 2000 years.

However, the Church, is called to be the place where it doesn’t matter who “your people” are. Rather it matters whose people

you are. And you and I are God's people. This is the family that we choose to be part of when we are baptized, that we reaffirm in our confirmation and that we live into every day of our lives. We live into this and we strive to make this place a place where we recognize the needs of all who enter the community not just those whose people we know, but everyone.

One very important way that we do this is by coming together to celebrate the sacraments. Those outward and visible signs of God's invisible grace. The sacraments are open to all faithful people, and through baptism we are invited to share those moments of grace with one another. We are all ministers of the church and the ministry of the baptized is to "represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take

their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church."¹

How we do that is not by preparing meals that only we enjoy; not by doing the same thing we do week in and week out, without thinking about it; not by asking "Are you Bob Jenkins' boy?" How we do that is by offering an invitation into worship to all who enter here. We do that by asking someone's name and not their lineage. We do that by asking if your neighbor needs help navigating the prayer book, or sharing the peace with everyone within arms reach, we do this by not making assumptions but asking questions and listening to the answers and remembering that we are the "strangers" who offer the kindness to the likes of Miss O'Hara.

Being a church community that's mission statement is as big as ours is a lofty goal, but we strive to live into it, but we don't always accomplish it. Transformative relationships begin by being willing to be

¹ BCP, 855 The Catechism.

transformed ourselves. Recognizing where our gifts and talents intersect with the needs of the world is something that all Christians ought to always have as the center of our ministry. The Church strives to invite everyone to the table, which has been prepared by God, for all of us, regardless of who are our people are, because we are God's people through water and oil and grace and the Holy Spirit. Let us welcome one another with "radical welcome" which is greater than "southern hospitality" and be a congregation that transforms lives in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen