

July 2, 2017

Now What Do We Do?

PRAYER

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN

SERMON

Throughout the pages of scripture, we hear the wonderful good news that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven the entirety of all our sins. Now that doesn't mean that because we are forgiven our sins we are free to do anything we darn well please. Paul makes that quite clear in the lesson that was read from his letter to the Romans. Nor does it mean that there are no consequences for our sins. The hurt and the pain our sins caused ourselves and others still remains. Forgiveness doesn't take away the hurt and the pain. It simply assures us that we will not suffer the death that separates us from God eternally.

So, what are we to do as forgiven people of God. Jesus gets at that in the gospel that was just read as he prepares his disciples for the ministry they are about to go forth and do in his name. And he tells them that whoever welcomes you welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. And Jesus makes it clear that this spirit of welcoming, this spirit of hospitality is to be a core value of the kingdom that he proclaims. So as the forgiven people of God as we go forth, Jesus wants us as his disciples today to live out that spirit of hospitality. It's a core value of his kingdom. But given our perception of hospitality, that seems to be rather bland as a core value of the kingdom Jesus proclaims.

I mean for us, hospitality is little more than a warm smile, a cup of coffee, and a couple of cookies. But in a biblical sense, hospitality is much deeper than that. It's much more involved than simple fuzzy feelings. We get a sense of this deeper meaning of hospitality, this biblical perception hospitality as we look at the origin of the word. The ideology of hospitality comes from the Latin word "hospitarie" which means to receive as a guest. And not just to put up with someone but to put someone up. That means to see to their needs, to provide for them. Not only to welcome them with open arms but to see that they have what they need to be comfortable.

It's important to know that both the words "hospital" and "hospitality" come from that same Latin source "hospitarie." And when we think about hospitals as places of welcoming to care for us in our sickness. We begin to see what a big deal hospitality is. In a biblical sense, it is a very big deal. We get a sense of that from one of the iconic figures of our country as we celebrate Independence Day on Thursday. Excuse me, on Tuesday.

For over 130 years, the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor has greeted immigrants with this deeper understanding of hospitality. What we might call radical hospitality. Inscribed on the

words of the tablet Lady Liberty holds are the words, "Give me your tired and your poor. Give me your huddled masses, the wretched refuge of your teeming shores. Send me the homeless, the tempest tossed. I hold my lamp at the golden door." That's radical hospitality. That's a hospitality that made our nation great. And that's a hospitality that is at the heart of the church.

In its early years, Christianity was more a community of faith than it was a doctrine of faith. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the churches of Rome were feeding over 20,000 people a week of the city's poor and homeless. And the church succeeded in large part in its ministry. Because of this radical hospitality it presented, offering the people a different understanding of life than the cultural norm of the day which oppressed the poor and the powerless. The church succeeded because of this ministry of welcoming. This ministry of hospitality. Hospitality is a part of the church's DNA. And that's what Jesus is calling us to do as he sends us out as disciples today. To be people who in their lives of discipleship live out and practice radical hospitality.

Now as Jesus gives us his exclamation point of his ministry, that disciples and those who follow him are to be practitioners of radical hospitality, he talks about its rewards. But as he talks about whoever gives a cold cup of water to these little ones will not lose out on his reward. He's speaking of rewards which the world could neither see nor understand. Because the rewards of which Jesus speaks is the blessing, the presence of God given to those who follow. Giving them strength and courage. Giving them help and hope. That's the rewards and it's rewards the world cannot see.

There was a football player for his high school that was the apple of his father's eye. And really a very good football player and his father would just beam with pride and joy whenever his son would make a great play or catch a touchdown pass. And largely because of the boy's efforts the team made it to the state championship game but in the championship game the poor guy just couldn't do anything right. He lost yardage on several critical plays and right at the end of the game he dropped a pass that could have been the winning touchdown. The poor guy was just crest fallen and hung his head as he walked off the field. All the while being taunted and jeered by the fans. He was just devastated, utterly dejected. His father said a little bit later never in my life, had I wanted to run down on that field and throw my arms around my son and give him all the love and comfort and support I had to offer. That's a wonderful illustration of the gracious reward of hospitality God offers to those who live as disciples of Jesus. Because in those times when we fail, in those times when we drop the ball of life we are assured that God does not abandon us. Because it's in those moments of our failure that we need God the most.

So, having experienced this gracious forgiveness of God given to us in death and resurrection of Christ. What are we to do? How are we to live our lives? What is it that God wants of us? Well Jesus makes that very clear in this text. What he wants is for us in our lives of discipleship to live and practice this radical hospitality. And the love and the forgiveness of God is our motivation to practice Godly hospitality because it is hospitality and love that has first been given to us. So as followers of Jesus he wants us to be practitioners of this radical hospitality. That doesn't just

put up with people given them a warm smile, a cup of coffee, a couple of cookies. But practitioners of a hospitality that put people up. Seeing to their needs, giving them love, giving them hope, sharing Christlike love with those who are lonely, with those who are broken, with those who are friendless. Seeing to their needs, sharing with them this gracious love which first God has shared with us.

#### PRAYER

May that peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN