

Ordinary Time 2020
June 7 – 28

Open Our Eyes

Christ has been raised. The Spirit has come with wind and fire. So now what? Now what do we do as the church called into being by the Christ who was born, who lived and healed and taught and loved, who

suffered and died on a cross, and was raised in glory? Before he left this earth to take his place at the right hand of God, he called his followers together one more time. In that moment, in which his followers were as shaky as they ever were, he gave what we have come to call the Great Commission. It is our mission statement, our reason for being. But to even begin to fulfill this calling, we must learn to open our eyes to the people who surround us. We must begin to #SeeAllThePeople!



Week 1: Trinity Sunday – Go, Therefore
June 7, 2020 - [Matthew 28:16-20](#)

INTRODUCTION

The first Sunday after Pentecost is also called Trinity Sunday. One explanation reports that this is the Sunday where you explain the Trinity. Good luck with that. The Trinity is one of those concepts that defies explanation. Oh, we can get close; we can provide hints or glimpses of the reality of the totality of the God we worship. But can we ever say to have explained the complexity that is the interrelationship of the Godhead? Probably not.

What we're left with then, is describing God the way God consistently self-describes: In relationship with us. Notice that the Trinity Sunday Gospel text was chosen because of the Trinitarian formula that Jesus invokes: "[B]aptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (v.19). But the bulk of the

passage isn't about God; it's about us. It's about what we will do in the name of God. It's about what we'll do because we belong to Jesus. When we focus on God, we always understand ourselves better. That's how this works.

So, how do we worship on Trinity Sunday? We attend to the glory of God first and foremost. We sing the songs of God's glory: "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty" or even "¡Santo! ¡Santo! ¡Santo!" if you're feeling adventurous. The first verse of this hymn ends with "God in three persons, blessed Trinity!" (*bendita Trinidad*). Use the Trinity Sunday prayer in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (76). Check the recommendations in the hymnal or in this worship package for more ideas. But find ways to celebrate the God we worship with as much glory as we can muster.

After the splash of red for Pentecost, the shining white of Easter comes back again along with the gold that speaks of the preciousness and the purity of our God. Let our sanctuaries be treasure houses of beauty because the God we worship is an artist and an inspiration of awe and wonder. Let there be a breathtaking glory about the space we create that points to the source of all that is good —not in lavishness or excess, but in the beautiful simplicity of purity. A simple white cloth on the table, perhaps, or the gold unadorned cross can be the visual centerpiece for worship.

Look for symbols that represent the Trinity — the triangles and circles and Celtic knots that speak of the diversity and the unity of God that point to our varied experience throughout scripture and the history of the people of God. This is not to be a prelude to what we really want to talk about. We don't give God glory as an introduction to our real subject, ourselves, and our mission. No, the worship of God is an end in and of itself. The attention to the glory and the wonder and the fullness of our Trinitarian God is enough for any worship event in the life of the church.

Yet, like the crowd at the Pentecost sermon we remembered last week, we can't help but ask, "Brothers and sisters, what shall we do? What do we do because of the wonder of this God? How shall we live? Who shall we be? Where shall we go? Whom shall we include? Whom shall we see because our God is Trinity?" This worship must spill out into the world around us; it must transform our living every day, not just on this day, not just in this place. How do we point beyond us as we pronounce the benediction? How do we send the people out with a desire to

share the variety of our God experience with the world that hungers to know what we know? How do we embody the love of God the creator, the hope of the redeemer Christ, and the sustaining faith of the ever-present Spirit in ways that are life giving in our own communities?

This series is about taking the inward focus of Trinity Sunday and turning it outward to the world in which we live. It is about remembering that we aren't just looking after our own souls, but are in the business of transforming the world. While it is always true, we could say it is especially true in this post-Pentecost season that our worship cannot end in the sanctuary. It must spill out into the community around us. Rethink the benediction as no longer an ending but a transition from worship inside to worship outside, from worship in word and song and ritualized movement to worship embodied in our hands and hearts and demeanor as we live in a distracted and distracting world.

PREACHING NOTES

It would be hard to stress this too much: Do not attempt to explain the Trinity! Do not. Except perhaps as an exercise in futility, as evidence that every attempt will fall short. Even if you found the perfect metaphor, even if the image you chose seems, in your mind, to sum up the totality of the immensity that is the Trinitarian experience of Almighty God, you've limited it somehow. Something will be left out, some nuance, some detail, some glimpse into the mind and activity of God. And you will, by the very nature of the attempt, reduce God to something that our human minds can grasp, and in grasping, we diminish and then ultimately dismiss. Do not attempt to explain the Trinity on this Trinity Sunday.

Instead, sing about it, draw pictures of it, find a poet to throw images into our heads, a storyteller to capture a small truth that points to a larger reality. Use your gifts, dear preacher, to capture the imaginations and hearts of the people longing to experience something of the reality of the God who loves them more than they can even understand.

Tell a story. Better yet, tell the story. Matthew helps us a lot this week. A great story to tell, full of the richness, the humanity, and the divinity of the gospel of grace and yet with a powerful, welcoming poignancy that can't help but draw us

all in. Every verse, every word, pulses with power. Take the first phrase of our text: "Now the eleven disciples." Pause there for a moment. Eleven. Doesn't that word just shout at you from the text? Eleven. For chapter after chapter, gospel after gospel, it was twelve. The twelve did this; the twelve did that; Jesus went with the twelve, chose the twelve. Now, it is eleven — a sign and symbol of brokenness, of betrayal and failure. It is a reminder that on our own, without the sustaining presence of the triune God, we won't make it. We won't fulfill this or any calling, this or any mission.

Yet, there is hope. Where did they go, this broken now eleven? Home, to Galilee. But not in despair, not because there wasn't anything else to do, so they might as well go home. No, Matthew says they went because they were directed. They were still following. There's the hope. We can still follow. In our failure, we can still follow. In our betrayal, we can still follow; in our denial, in our brokenness, in our weakness, in our ..., we can still follow. They followed the one who sent them.

They probably didn't know why, but they didn't ask. They just went. To the mountain in their own backyards, where he sent them. Then he was there. Matthew wouldn't make it in Hollywood. He misses too many dramatic moments. There aren't any special effects, no background music, no drone shots or slow zooms. "When they saw him." That's all we get. John has them gasp from the boat. "It's the Lord!" Which is followed by a loud splash and the rapid creak of oars as they rushed to shore. But not Matthew. "When they saw him."

When they saw him what? Well, what else? They worshiped. What else would you do when the Resurrected Lord appears on a mountain in your backyard? You worship. They worshiped; they shouted; they broke out the guitars and the drums and they raised their hands and they hugged everyone with tears rolling down their cheeks, as they sang, "It is good to be in the house of the Lord!" Except, they didn't. Matthew, understating again, says "they worshiped him, but some doubted."

Wait. What? Doubted? On the mountain next to the resurrected one? The one who walked out of a tomb? Some doubted. What did they doubt? Him? Themselves? This moment? Maybe it was dream, some thought. Maybe they'll wake up with tear-stained faces and the awful reality of his death will still sit in their guts as if they had swallowed broken glass, as if they had shouldered lead

weights. Maybe they doubted that they would walk away without even more scars and wounds, when the one they allowed to die now walks on earth again. Maybe they doubted his disappointment in their failure. Matthew doesn't say. They worshiped and some doubted. They all worshiped; some doubted. They worshiped as they doubted. They came with their uncertainties, their hesitations. They took their place and wadded their bulletins and mumbled the prayers and bleeped out the parts of the hymns that didn't seem real to them. But they were there; they worshiped. Doubts are welcome, even in the worship of the Risen Lord.

Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Here we go, they must have thought. He's in charge now; the sword is about to be unsheathed, the white charger is just off stage waiting for him to leap on its back and gallop off to begin the battle, to usher in the new age. All authority has been given to me. All authority. Go, therefore.

Matthew always looks backward as he writes. You're supposed to hear an echo, as Barbara Brown Taylor says. Another mountain and another hesitant observer. But instead of a shining Resurrected One, there is a blazing bush. The Voice says, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And some doubted. You better believe there was doubting going on upon that mountain too. "I have observed the misery of my people, I have heard their cry, indeed I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them" (Ex. 3:6-8). All authority has been given to me. Or all authority is me. I will send you.

"Go therefore" seems like an appropriate response to "all authority has been given me." It is how God works, how God has always worked. I send you. We have a mission from God. *Go, therefore, make disciples, baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teach them, and remember:* A fourfold mission. Each is important. Go: We aren't the church when we sit still. Sitting still is necessary but is only preparation for going and for being the church at work in the world. Go.

Make Disciples. Ah, we could spend a week on this one. And we should. But for now, hear the invitation to create relationships, to build up people, to engage with the world as it is so that we can help people see the world as it could be. This

isn't about tracts on the doorstep, about momentary conversion events; this is the long haul, the narrow way. He doesn't say, "Go win souls." He says, "make disciples." Souls will be won in the process; don't worry about that. But we're not the soul winners; we are the disciple-makers.

Baptize, invite into a community, into a lifelong formation of self and soul. Find ways of entry and celebrate, with the whole community, the starting point. Let there be words and symbols and rituals and joy. Let there be joy when anyone starts the journey. And let there be a promise to be the church every step of the way.

Teach. There might be a translation hiccup here. "Teaching them to obey everything I taught you." The word we've translated as *obey* could also be translated as *keep*. Teach them to *keep* everything I commanded you. Keeping sounds different. It sounds more accessible, somehow—like there is a treasure to share, some wisdom, some insight, some joy, and some hope that we received from Jesus, and now he wants us to give it away; to give it so that others can keep it. And what did he command us? "Love one another as I have loved you." That's the command we teach others to keep. And we can only teach such a thing by doing it.

Remember. Remember I am with you. OK, you can't explain that either. You can't prove it. Preach until you're blue in the face, and it won't be proof. Yet it is true. We believe it is true. We sense it is true. We know that we can't do half of what we have done, a fraction of what we want to do on our own. Only by his presence can we put one foot in front of another. Only by his presence can we issue one more invitation, care for one more soul, one more neighbor. Because we remember, we are not alone.

But how? How do we do all this? The rest of this series is intended to put a frame around the disciple-making process. So, there could be a "coming attractions" moment in your sermon this week. The mission is one of engagement. At its heart, the doctrine of the Trinity is about engagement, somehow, someday. We launch from this moment because we worship a God who lives engaged. Go therefore.

Week 2: See All The People

June 14, 2020 – [Matthew 9:35-10:8, \(9-23\)](#)

INTRODUCTION

How do you count? Does that seem like an odd question? Maybe it is, but it is still valid. We are entering the longest season on the Christian calendar. Some call it Ordinary Time, and some call it the Season after Pentecost. So, this week is either the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time or the Second Sunday after Pentecost. It's the second because last week was the first, but we focused on Trinity Sunday instead. So, how do you count?

Or maybe it doesn't matter. Maybe it is just June 14 or Flag Day. (*Tune in later for July 4 suggestions.*) How do you count? Count what? Count the days; mark the passing of time. One of the things that "season after Pentecost" can do is remind us that we are walking in the power of the Spirit. We are the church empowered, equipped, and sent by the God we worship and the Christ we offer. By counting the days, or the weeks, all season long, from spring through summer into fall, we are saying we have a mission, we have a purpose. We don't just gather to worship for ourselves. We aren't just about taking care of our own souls. We are being shaped; we are practicing how to offer Christ to the world. The songs we sing with one another to God in worship are the songs we sing to the world. The prayers we pray to God with one another are the prayers we pray on behalf of the world. The testimonies we rehearse in worship together are the stories we tell in our communities and neighborhoods and world.

By counting the days, we are reminded that this matters. It is a part of God's purpose in the world. We are part of God's purpose in the world. So, our worship task this series is to bring the world into worship, to be reminded that we are preparing to be a part of what God is doing, already doing, in the world around us. This week's theme is "See All The People." So how might we see our neighborhood, our community?

What if we commissioned all the photographers in the community (and with cell phone technology, who isn't a photographer?) to capture the community around them and to send in pictures of what they see, where they live, and whom they

encounter. These should be honest pictures that aren't trying to put things in a bad light, or a good light, but just a real light. And let these pictures cover the walls of the church or be projected during worship. Are we still online? (We hope not! Or not exclusively anyway.) But let the feed be more pictures of outside than inside this week. Yes, we love to see our beautiful churches and sanctuaries, but in this series, we're looking beyond the walls. What do you see next door to the church? Next door to the parsonage? Next door to the members? Who are the people around us? Do they all look like us? Do they all live like us?

This isn't about putting down the community, making us feel sorry for them, or secretly glad for us. This is about seeing what is really there. We are sometimes so wrapped up in our church bubble that we don't even see what is all around us. We don't see what God is doing in the lives of those who don't know God's name. God sees them; we can too.

Sing the songs of the world, not just the church. "Christ for the World, We Sing." Remind ourselves that we are looking outward, not just inward. This isn't a call to neglect the body of the church, because we're a part of the world too. But it is a call to remember that we aren't the whole world. And it's the whole world that God has in hand, not just our part of it.

So, how do you count? The point is the days count. Let's make them count by paying attention to the world around us, the world in which God is at work. But what if we use Ordinary Time as our counter? Doesn't that say these days aren't as important? These are ordinary; the others are special? No! It doesn't mean that at all. Ordinary Time isn't about being ordinary. It's about being counted. The "ordinal" consists of the days we count. It means these days matter. Let's make them matter by practicing seeing the world in which we live, the world God loves enough to die for. How will we count?

PREACHING NOTES

"Harassed and helpless (Matt 9:36). What a great descriptor, don't you think? If there is a phrase that seems to sum up the world around us, it is "harassed and helpless." In fact, that would probably make a great sermon title, wouldn't it? "Harassed and Helpless: Film at 11." As catchy as that phrase is, you should

probably avoid starting there. That is an assessment, an interpretation. There might be space for that in the sermon, but it isn't the best starting place.

On the other hand, there is another famous phrase in this text, one that seems like a starting place. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matt. 9:37). That is another truth we can't help but latch on to. This idea, this statement, has launched all sorts of mission and ministry in the church—and rightly so. It is the reality that faces the church all the time; there is too much to do and not enough doers. There is too much need in the world around us and not enough resources to meet those needs.

Except, maybe it isn't about resources. Maybe it is about something else that is lacking. Maybe this phrase, too, isn't the best place to start. "Ask the Lord of the harvest" is something that needs to find a place in the proclamation. But another starting place seems to be lurking in this text.

Not really lurking; it's right there at the front, where it belongs. "He saw the crowds" (9:36). That's our starting point. It is his starting point; therefore, it should be ours—our starting point as preachers and our starting point as a congregation wanting to engage the community around us; wanting to live as Pentecost people. He saw the crowd. Which means he was within seeing distance, not removed, not behind walls and doors. It means that he was approachable and accessible. He was where the people were. It means that he wasn't just passing through on the way to his next engagement, next meeting, next speaking opportunity. It means he was engaged in the world around him.

We know he was engaged because of the next phrase in the verse. Not only did he see the crowd, but in seeing it, he had compassion. His compassion wasn't disembodied, caring in the abstract, seeing problems needing solutions. No, he had compassion because he saw the people around him.

What does it mean to see the people? To really see them? Not to prejudge or categorize, but simply to see. To see them as people worthy of compassion and care? We might see that the people around us are indeed harassed and helpless, suffering from the lack of a savior. But we won't know that is what we will see until we look. Oh, sure we can assume, but what do we see?

Perhaps it would be helpful to stand in the place of the other for a moment. To consider what it means, what it feels like to be seen, as opposed to the times when we felt overlooked or ignored and pigeonholed. To know that someone has seen the real self, hidden underneath and still manages to love and accept us. What a profound difference that makes in our lives, in our hearts, in our self-image. Can we do less when we seek to engage the community around us?

Because he sees and has compassion, because he knows that it is God's will that all be gathered into the loving arms of grace, Jesus calls the twelve. Pause a moment here, something significant is going on. According to Matthew anyway, Jesus calls the twelve in order for them to be those laborers that are so few. The community isn't called together for their own sake. The twelve aren't called in order to tend to their own souls, to make sure they are right with God. No, they are called to go out, to be the church that sees the crowds.

As we work through the rest of the text, we can't help but wonder how that might apply to us today. Sure, we can name missionaries of history and today who still go out like this, not expecting payment, not relying on an abundance of resources, but relying on the hospitality of strangers. If we read on to the parenthetical suggested verses, we see the austerity of this call, the danger, but also the radical call of the gospel. The laborers in the fields come to upset the status quo, and that is never an easy task.

But how do we rely on something other than our resources, our comforts, when we seek to see the people? It must be exactly that, that we see first. We don't approach the other with answers already tied up in a package. We don't come to our neighbors because we want to fix them, or threaten them, or chastise them. We come to see them. We don't rely on our theology, on our preferences for worship and our language for prayer. We come truly empty-handed so that we can see our neighbor without the filters.

Is this easy? Is it just a matter of saying that's what I'm going to do? Is it just flipping a switch to turn off our prejudice? Of course not. But we try again and again to see those who surround us. Maybe we'll see them as harassed and helpless, but harassed by whom and helpless in front of what? And maybe we'll see them as resources of strength and grace that cause us to be amazed and to give the God they may not know thanks for the blessing of seeing them. What is

most likely is that if we look long enough we'll see ourselves in them. We are like them, and they are like us in the ways that really matter. And that, too, can be an occasion of praise.

Week 3: Hear All the People

June 21, 2020 – [Matthew 10:24-39](#)

INTRODUCTION

This is the third Sunday after Pentecost. It is also the Summer Solstice, or the first day of summer. And, of course, it is Father's Day. There are probably some other things to sneak on to the calendar if we check those obscure lists. (National hop on one-foot day, or celebrate biscuits and gravy day, something like that anyway.) As followers of the Spirit that comes from Christ, of course the "after Pentecost" designation takes precedence. But that doesn't mean we can't observe other markers in our midst. In fact, Pentecost invites us to bring life to anything and everything that we do as the people in worship.

So go ahead and bring the signs of summer into the worship of the people of God, not because we want to be confused as sun worshipers, but because the Son who rose from the dead sent us a Spirit to bring us life abundant. Let the colors be green and growing, sparkling with life and energy and joy. Let the liturgy speak of the glories of summer, give thanks for trees and warmth and for rain and growing things of all kinds. Celebrate the laughter of children and the refreshment of cold drinks on a hot day. Let summer be the language by which you praise God today. And then, of course, remind folks that the church is at work all summer long, and don't forget to put church in their summer plans.

Assuming, of course, that by this time we are back together worshipping together as one family of God. This is written during the quarantine, and the hope is that by June 21, we will have been back together long enough to have forgotten what it was like to long for one another's presence. Some of us may have chosen to keep some of the online activities going. Some of us may continue our online worship because, for some reason, it drew people in ways that the face-to-face didn't always. So celebrate summer however you gather.

And don't forget Dad. Yes, it is a delicate thing. Whether it is Mother's Day or Father's Day, some will be hurt by the words, by the memories, by the associations. No matter what you do, there is the possibility of pain. But ignoring won't make it go away either. So, let there be a moment, a segment of the service where there is a prayer for Fathers. Pray for the fathers we honor and the fathers who struggle; pray for the fathers in name and the fathers in action, for mentors and guides and models by which we find our way into adulthood. Let there be a testimony or two giving honor to a father. But don't let that be the only voice, the only word, as if to say that the word itself implies perfection. "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Acknowledge the struggle—both for those who have done more damage than healing as fathers and those whose experience of father brings only memories of pain and rejection.

And why should we do such a thing? Because those voices, those people, those stories deserve to be heard. The "Open Our Eyes" series leans into the hymn (454 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*), moves to the second verse, which invites us to sing "*Open my ears, that I may hear, voices of truth thou sendest clear.*" Those stories are stories of truth that need to be heard and need to be acknowledged.

Father's Day, however, is not the center of worship. Don't build the order around defining fatherhood. Let it be a background; let it be one of the voices heard, along with summer, along with the echoes of Pentecost. The center of our worship is always Jesus the Christ and the call placed on our existence as disciples seeking the transformation of the world. So today we are asking for the Spirit to open our ears to the voices striving to be heard, the voices of truth that God is sending us through what have become the most unlikely of sources. So, how do we hear those voices?

Today might be a day for listening to those outside the church—those who cry for justice, yes, but also those who work for justice from a different perspective. They are partners with us. Today is the day to listen to music that might be called secular, and yet has themes of redemption and resurrection and hope. Today might be the day to find a poem or a story in which the Jesus we know by name is hidden or longed for. What movie tells a story we need to hear? Venture out of our enclave, though. Don't just turn to "Christian" films or books or writers. We're trying to hear all the people, to hear other voices. Of course, we have limits; this

isn't about shocking and offending the people in the pews, although the gospel is often shocking and offending. But this is about listening to other voices.

Not only outside voices, however. There are inside voices that are rarely heard. How can those whom no one pays attention to be given voice on this day? The underrepresented communities among us? From whom should we in worship on this day where we hope to "Open Our Ears"?

PREACHING NOTES

The Gospel text for this week begins with an odd little proverb. What was Jesus talking about with the disciple and the master and then the introduction of Beelzebul (and even though spell-check prefers Beelzebub, Matthew clearly preferred the bul ending – he was known as the "Lord of the Flies" and if that doesn't bring back memories of high school literature class, you went to a different school). It's probably not helpful to spend a lot of time on the etymology or interpretation of Beelzebul, most just understand it as an alternative name for Satan. These two verses do, however, provide an excellent launch into the theme for this week in our "Open Our Eyes" series. The point seems to be, "Whom do you listen to?"

Too often, we only listen to ourselves; that's the disciple being greater than the master part of the proverb. To listen to a master, an expert, takes humility—which is in short supply these days. And if that self is the head of a house, the leader of a community, and takes on the role of the Lord of the Flies, then self becomes the center of existence for the whole household, and brokenness results.

Who do you hear? "So have no fear of them." Who are the them that Jesus refers to here? The them who follow Beelzebul, or the them who listen only to themselves, who acknowledge no master, no expert? Well, yes, both, or any really. "Have no fear" is one of Jesus' favorite lines. Have no fear of those who want to diminish your witness. Have no fear of those who tell a different story. Have no fear of those who might oppose you or attack you. Have no fear of them. All your energy and respect and awe go to the one who holds you in the palm of the hand—the one who holds your soul.

“What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered proclaim from the housetops” (v.27). What you hear, that speaks of the voice of God, in the dark, tell in the light. What could that mean? What if, in our context, it means that sometimes God speaks in unlikely places or through unexpected people? That means we must be listening to the world, to the people around us. We need to hear all the people. And of course, not everything said speaks of or from God. Do we really need to say that? Maybe we do. There is plenty spoken in our world today that is the antithesis of what God is whispering in our ears and other ears. This isn’t a call to baptize every word spoken. It isn’t a call to claim “it’s all good!” Because it clearly isn’t all good. But there is good being spoken. This is a call to listen and discern. And when we hear it, when we hear the voice of God in the voice of the people around us, then we proclaim it. Or when we hear a cry from the people that is a call to God, then we bring it into the light.

When we hear all the people, we find that God is at work. We sometimes think that God only has us. “Our hands are the only hands God has.” While the sentiment is understandable, that idea isn’t the whole truth. God is at work beyond us, above us, around us. Sometimes the call is to catch up to what God is doing. And how will we know what God is doing if we don’t listen to the people around us?

It isn’t easy or comfortable business. Sometimes, because of what we hear, we then cause problems. We make divisions; we call out injustice and oppression. We disturb the status quo. That is the sword that Jesus brought and now hands to us to wield, not to bring violence, not to destroy, but to bring truth and justice to a world sorely lacking both. That is the result of this proclaiming in the light thing.

And notice we aren’t permitted to proclaim in the darkness. We don’t hint and suggest and whisper. We shout. We must be confident in the truth that comes from God. We have to be sure of what we proclaim. Does it match the God Jesus presents to us? Does it represent the truth that Jesus came to proclaim? Is the sword we wield a sword of our frustration and our anger and our prejudice, or is it the sword of Christ’s truth?

We have to be committed to Christ, above all else. That’s a hard word to hear. *Above all else.* Matthew remembers it this way: “whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.” Whew, a hard word indeed. But what if we

understood that to mean first, that it's not a competition. We aren't measuring how much we love and who we love more. Rather, we're realizing that our love for fathers and mothers and anyone is complete only when we love like Christ loved. That was the command, "love one another, as I have loved you." When we love Christ first, then we are enabled to love others. Accepting Christ's transforming love equips us, transforms us, so that we can love.

All things of the spirit take time. We have to grow into this way of loving, this way of being in the world. We can talk about many practices that help us grow in love. But one practice we are recommending in this series is that we open our ears and hear all the people.

Week 4: Love All the People

June 28, 2020 – [Matthew 10:40-42](#)

INTRODUCTION

Our series began on Trinity Sunday, where we celebrated the communal God who calls us to become a community and then to go out into the wider community to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And we do that first by "seeing all the people." So, in the second week of the series, we asked the sending God to open our eyes that we may see. And then last week, we asked that sending God to open our ears that we may hear.

So, what is the word for our final week of the series? If we follow the hymn, it should be "open *our* mouths, and let *us* bear gladly the warm truth everywhere." Now we're on more comfortable ground. It's our turn to talk! We get to be the one talking, the one taking the stage, the one to make everyone listen to us for a change. Right?

Love all the people. That's where we're going next with this series. Week One: Go Therefore! Week Two: Open Our Eyes, See All the People. Week Three: Open Our Ears, Hear All the People. Week Four: Open Our Hearts, Love All the People. It is an essential prerequisite to going out into the world around us. Let's face it: there are lots of reasons to engage with the community around us. We can start with growing the church or keeping the doors open. We need to share the leadership,

to pay our bills, so we are driven to go get new church members. Or, we might be doing it out of a sense of duty. This is something we're "supposed" to do, so we might as well get it out of the way, so that we can go back to the things we'd rather do. Or maybe to convict sinners, tell people how wrong they are or how bad they are. We want to tell them to get right or get left behind. We want to scare them into the safety and security of the church, whatever it takes.

It's true that people have been motivated by all sorts of things to attempt to make disciples, some good, some not so good. But the deeper truth is that nothing will work if it is not done out of love. Before Jesus told us to go out and make disciples, He told us to love. Love one another. Love your neighbor as yourself. So, this final week of our series is all about hospitality. How do we welcome out of love?

Our worship needs to be full of stories of welcome and testimonies of hospitality. Are there new members who are there because of the welcome they received? Is there someone who was sure no one loved them until they encountered someone from the congregation who showed them love? Having come through a pandemic and social distancing, what are the stories of how neighbors tried to reach out to one another and provide the help that was needed? Tell the stories of feeding the first responders and the frontline medical personnel. Don't let those stories be forgotten because the crisis is over. (We are hoping and praying that by now it is over!)

Make space in worship for words of welcome. Extend the greeting time. Say something like, "Today we are all about welcome. So, don't just turn to the person beside you and mumble the peace of Christ. Move out into the aisles and offer a welcome; ask about someone you haven't seen for a while. Thank someone who did something good for you. Spend some time in this gathering moment so that later we can truly worship God as a community of love." Let there be music that is played that gets people moving. Then come back and sing a song of welcome, like "The Summons" from *The Faith We Sing* (2130), or "Draw the Circle Wide" by Mark Miller (*Worship & Song* 3154), or even "Open My Eyes, That I May See" (*UMH* 454).

Leave the doors open this week, if you can. Yes, it might be distracting; yes, it might be loud. But open those doors as a sign that we are indeed a church of

open doors. Or open windows; that's a way of letting the outside in, as you prepare going from inside out. In other words, let the barrier be permeable, a smaller distinction between us and the world.

Yes, we have something to say to the world, but it is only heard or only responded to if we say it out of love. Verse three of "Open My Eyes" ends with the refrain, "Silently now I wait for thee, ready my God, thy will to see. Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!" May it be so this week and every week as we worship.

PREACHING NOTES

Yes, the Gospel text is not about the hospitality we provide, but about the hospitality we receive. "Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me" (v.40). It sets hospitality as a standard of effectiveness. What are the proper metrics for judging the strength of a church or a ministry? We think it is numbers—how many? But what if it was in grace given and grace received? That is surely harder to measure, but it is significant, at least Jesus seems to think so.

Having called the disciples together in order to send them out, Jesus then warns them about the difficulty of the task ahead of them. "Sheep among wolves," he stresses, "when they hand you over" (when, notice, not if) and "when they persecute you in one town, flee to the next." Wow, that makes you want to sign up, doesn't it? Oh, of course, he says, "I've got your back. God's got your back." He's numbered the hairs of your head, so don't be afraid. Right. Never mind that they might have been numbered, but they are falling out at an increasing rate! Meaning, God's got you, but that doesn't mean you won't suffer loss. But the loss isn't eternal; the loss won't define you.

Then after all that scary stuff, Jesus concludes these impossible mission instructions with these few verses on welcome, on being welcomed. "Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones..." To you, in other words, to the one who comes in my name. The little ones are the beginners, the ones just starting in faith, just making their first foray into the mission field.

But wait, then there is the "in the name of a disciple." So, what is happening here? Is Jesus talking about the hospitality the disciples will receive as they go out

to do what he sends them to do? Or is he talking about the hospitality that is done in their name? Is he talking about the effect of their mission? The only answer to these questions is yes. Yes, he is talking about the hospitality that the disciples receive, and, yes, he is talking about the impact of their presence on those they go to meet. He's talking about the effect of loving the people enough to welcome and be welcomed. Hospitality, like love, isn't a one-off moment, a one-time experience. It is a way of life, a way of being and living in the world.

He is saying, it seems clear, that you will be welcomed if you are a welcoming presence; that you will transform lives, even if only in small, seemingly insignificant ways like offering a cup of cold water on a hot day, only if you are transformed yourself. It isn't our words that bring this grace; it is our whole being, our whole presence.

That is why we can say, "we welcome everyone," but not be welcoming in practice. We can say "everyone is invited," but put up all kinds of barriers in how we interact with the stranger in our midst. We can say "everyone is included," even while our attitudes and behaviors exclude as a matter of course. Opening our mouths must be preceded by opening our hearts.

Notice how Jesus never gives a script, never tells them what to say. "As you proclaim the good news" is as close as he gets to being proscriptive. The implication is that this good news is proclaimed as much through our living as through our speaking, as much through our attitudes and the disposition of our faces as through whatever words we might find within us to speak. Oh, speaking is important. We "must give an account of the hope that lives within us." But the ones who don't lose their reward are givers of cups of water not proclaimers of proverbs.

The hospitality we receive is related to the hospitality we give. The love we give is related to the love we receive. That's how this works. We can't scare people into the arms of God, but we can love them there. We can't force people into the fellowship of the church, but we can welcome them there. This text tells us that hospitality is not an add-on, not an extra in the busyness of our mission and ministry. It is core. It is what defines us. A quote sometimes attributed to the poet Maya Angelou is illuminating here: "I've learned that people will forget what you

said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

No matter who originally said it, we can all sense the truth in it. There is something significant in how we welcome and how we are welcomed. Jesus is telling the disciples that this road of making disciples, sharing the good news is a difficult one, but that there are blessings to be found on it. Often, those blessings are small and simple and likely to be overlooked. But if we open our eyes, open our ears, and open our hearts, we'll begin to experience those treasures in the kin-dom of God right now.