

**Sunday, July 5, 2020 – Matthew 10:38-42**

<sup>38</sup> Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

<sup>40</sup> “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup> Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. <sup>42</sup> And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”

And this is the word of God, for the people of God, and all God's people said Amen.

Well, we've been in this series now since Trinity Sunday. We've 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. That's what the Methodist Church says in our mission statement; to make disciples for the transformation of the world.

And we do that first by seeing the people. We talked about that the week after Trinity Sunday, and then in the second week. The third week of the series we asked that God, who sends us to open our eyes that we could see. And then the last week we asked that, God to open our ears so that we might hear all the news. And all the concerns of the people around us.

So, the word for the final week of the series is love. And if we've been following the fact that we've been singing Open My Eyes now for four weeks, we see that we're talking about going out, as Jesus has sent us into the world to make disciples and doing that by really, truly seeing what's going on with the people around us, and then by listening and hearing what they have to say. And this week, we will talk about loving people as they are. And as we conclude this series, we're really starting out on an adventure for the rest of 2020 and 2021 and it will be an interesting adventure because we have to do things differently than we've ever done them before.

But our focus is going to be a one word focus this year. We've spent some time, and you've known me for longer than I've been here, I mean, you saw me around. I came to Swiss steak dinners over there in that building and I got to come to join services sometimes and I hung out with Pastor John every now and then up in the office and we talked. Over the time that we've known each other, I know that pastor John and I, we both talked about growing deeper in our faith with Jesus, and we've talked about living this life.

So, our focus this year is going to go outward from the church building, since we can't spend a lot of time in the building right now. So, our focus for this year is others, simply others, how are we going to take what God gave us and dig deeper in and think about what God would have us do to reach other people in and around our area. I can tell you, there's plenty of people to reach. There's plenty of people that are struggling. And there are plenty of people who have not responded to the gospel, for whatever reason, but they're still out there. And let me tell you, some of them know what we're supposed to be like.

I was told yesterday that I was a lowlife, gutless wonder because we weren't back in our building. And it allowed me to have a conversation about the church not being the building, but the people being the church. We come together to worship as a family. They know what we're supposed to be like, or they think they know what we're supposed to be like. So, when we take that faith of ours, and we begin to share it out of the building in small ways like those baskets, and sending cards, making phone calls and helping that that older lady on the sidewalk outside the supermarket get those groceries in the car. And we have the opportunity to just say, God bless you or the opportunity to say I'll pray for you this week. What do you need me to pray about? Even if they normally don't want to hear it, they usually won't turn you aside. They usually will let you pray for them. First and foremost because they can't figure out a nice way to say no. Secondly, because we're at a point in our history where most people are feeling like they'll take any help they can get. We may never see the outcome, but you've planted the seed for God.

It's true that people in our age have been motivated by all kinds of things. A lot of us have as our motivation, making disciples and that can be really good sometimes, and sometimes, not so good. Remember the days when some preachers used to come along and say; you're going to hell. And I'm sure that that had an effect on somebody. It scared him into the kingdom, but did it keep him in the kingdom? And then there those who really, really reach out in love and they are the ones who when they love their neighbor as themselves, they are much more successful in making disciples and making converts to the kingdom than anyone who is trained to do so that uses the other tactic.

Everything we do needs to be full of stories of welcome. You know, the way you spoil me? We can spoil everybody like that. You probably shouldn't give them Minnie Mouse masks because, well, there's only one Pastor Sandi. And some people would say hallelujah to that! Tell stories of our life together. Tell the stories of what Jesus means to us. Tell the stories of the love and the fellowship between brothers and sisters. The story of what we've learned during this crisis when the crisis is over. Talk about everything that God has done and shared with you.

We May be sitting out here, but we are blessed that we're able to worship together. And that's something that God has allowed us to do. Man doesn't really have control. Make space for words of welcome everywhere you go. In worship, when somebody new walks in the door or somebody that we haven't seen for a long time, on the street, in the workplace. Extend your greetings to people saying I'm just am glad you're here. And really mean it.

Every church has its people that are the greeters, right? And they don't all wear badges that say greeter. But today I'm commissioning every single one of you to be a greater. Talk to people, celebrate people's presence. When that person sitting next to you looks at you, offer them all the love and peace of Christ that you can offer them. Thank somebody who did something good for you. Spend the time in the gathering moments, when we can truly share with each other. Then come back and sing with all your heart when we're outside and when we're inside, smile and meditate and offer a sign of Christ's peace, anyway you know how. You know we will still continue to grow each other.

The Gospel text isn't necessarily about the hospitality that we provide but about the hospitality that we receive. Whoever welcome you, welcomes me and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the Father who sent me. But it does sell hospitality as this standard of effectiveness. It sets up Christ like love as the standard for everything we do.

A lot of people will judge churches by their size. And that's great until something happens in in the area like job losses, a plant closes down, or two. Jobs are lost and people get up and move and all of a

sudden, that church that was judged by its huge numbers is now being judged because it's small. But that's not how you judge church. You Judge church by its effectiveness to reach other people with the love of Christ. That's how you judge a church. That's how you question when you will ask yourself, is what I'm doing worthwhile? Does it give somebody new life? Does it share with somebody the love of Christ? If it does, do it.

Having called the disciples together in order to send them out, Jesus warns them about all these difficulties. You know, when they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, we talked about that. That makes you really want to sign up for this mission doesn't it? If they persecute you in one town, Marlene, go to the next, and then go to the next. What makes the mission so vital, so important, what touches our hearts through the mission, is seeing the love of God spread into the hearts of others. When you see somebody who's depressed, when you see somebody who's been missing from the church for a long time, suddenly come back because they're feeling that love, because there's a feeling, that call from Jesus through you. You are a success.

And then after all the scary stuff, Jesus concludes that he has these instructions. Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of my loved ones, they will be rewarded. In other words, to the one who comes in my name, bearing my peace, bearing my love, that is the one that I will award. But wait, then there's discipleship. Well, we all know its kind of hard to give somebody what we haven't already experienced. So, soak in the love of God. Study. Not because you're preparing to be Billy Graham, because there's only one Billy Graham. But you can still be a Blanche, you can still be a Margaret, you can still be a Barb. And offer the stories of Jesus the best way you know how. The best representation of Jesus is when we say, "do you know what Jesus did for me?" And then sharing that because people need to hear that, especially in this season where we are, in the things that we're going through.

A lot of churches say, we welcome everyone. Until you get in the door, and then suddenly it doesn't seem so welcoming. Some churches say, everyone's invited. Then when some folks show up, some of the members will say, oh, well, we're glad you're here. Some churches talk about being open and friendly with their mouths. We are blessed, because this church is open and friendly with its hearts, and its actions. Keep doing that, and build on it. We have something to say to the world. But it's only heard and responded to when we say it in love.

Verse three of Open My Eyes says; Silently now I wait for Thee, ready my God Thy will to see, open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine. The hospitality that we receive is related to hospitality that we are willing to give. The love that we are willing to give is related to the love that we received from God. That's how this works. We can't scare people into the church but we can welcome them there. We can't force people into the fellowship of the church, but we can lead them there. This text tells us that hospitality and Christ like love, those aren't add-ons. They are not extras in the busyness of ministry and mission. They are at its very core. It's what defines us as the people of God.

There's a quote that is sometimes attributed to Maya Angelou and she says, 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. Our calling is unique and so foreign to how the rest of the world operates, that it makes people feel things that sometimes have never felt before. Love and acceptance. Permission to be who they are on the way to becoming who God created them to be. We're called to love in such a way that it makes a difference in people's lives, we're called to love so deeply that people seek Christ's love mirrored in us.

I used to know a pastor who, oh my gosh, he'd been a pastor for some 50 years, and every time that man walked in the door, it was felt that Jesus walked in the door with them. It got to the point, almost, where you felt the love of Jesus, and then you were realized he was there. And his name was Clifton Sibly. And Cliff has been gone for a long time and now he's enjoying being in the presence of God for real. But the mark he left on the people that he ministered to was that mark of Christ like love that just drew them in. They had no desire to escape ministry, they had no desire to escape the church, they had no desire to run, because they found what they needed in the presence of Jesus.

We're called to that life and we're called to that. No matter originally said that quote, we're not sure, we can all sense that there's some truth in it. There's something significant in how we reach out to people, and how we love people, and how we welcome people. Jesus told the disciples that this road of making disciples, spreading the good news, is not an easy one. It can be difficult at times, but there are blessings that are found in it that will never be found anywhere else. And those blessings are often small. They're simple. And they're likely to be overlooked if we're not paying attention. But if we open our arms, and our ears and our hearts will begin to experience those treasures of the kingdom of God, right now. Amen.