

## *To yield or not to yield to God!*

*Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42*

There is a song by Joe Wise that I remember singing at camps around a fire that says:

“Welcome in! Take my hand  
Let us walk no more and talk no more as strangers in this land,  
As we meet here is the cause way of God’s love and your desire  
Let’s bring the night to fire, Welcome in!”

These words capture what Jesus was teaching the disciples. These words, “Let us walk no more and talk no more as strangers in this land.” Reflect God’s deep hospitality offered to each and everyone of us. Let’s listen to the words of Jesus from the gospel of Matthew again: “Whoever welcome you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Today in passage from Romans Paul is calling us to “Present your members to God as instruments of righteousness.” As I studied this passage this week, I looked through several translations of this passage. In some of these other translations the word present was translated as: “yield yourself to God” or “offer yourself to God” and finally “give yourselves to God.”

Emilie M. Townes, a theologian, writes the following about the passage from Matthew today. She writes:

“In just a few short sentences of power and compassion, we are challenged to think more deeply about what is meant by welcoming one another. It is only after doing so that we discover the reward that comes from the deep hospitality found in God’s welcome of us.”<sup>1</sup>

Again like many of the scripture passages we are called to put God at the center of our lives. And if God is at the center of our beings then it means that when we welcome other in, we are approaching each other through God. Extending genuine hospitality to others means putting aside our ego, our pride, our self doubt. It

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<sup>1</sup> Emilie M. Townes, *Feasting on the Word*, Year A, Volume 3, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), p. 188.

means welcoming people who we deeply connect with along with people who we find distant and abrasive. This is not easy. This radical hospitality that God offers us and which we offer each other needs to be grounded and rooted in compassion not judgement. It requires spiritual discipline and practice. It requires that we look beyond what we see on the surface, and recognizing the gifts that God has given each person. We need to take time to really know each other, to see the Christ in each other. We need to discover each other's vulnerabilities and needs. And we need to listen and come to understand different world views and perspectives.

Radical hospitality is about inviting people in, not simply waiting for people to find a place. Radical hospitality is not passive it is active. Being an affirming church is about living radical hospitality. It is about meeting people where they are at. Angela Glasel was recently quoted as saying that "Affirming is a verb. It's alive and it's living." At the end of camp in the summer I would always invite the staff to do up affirmations. This is the practice of intentionally naming the gifts you see in others. It is about naming what you appreciate about others, how they have made a difference in your life. It is about seeing God in each person. To this day I still have the affirmations that I have been given by people I worked with, from youth and children and adults that I have ministered to. These are the words that remind me of who God knows me to be. These are the words that remind me of what God calls me to do and be in the world. This is the reward that we each receive when we welcome God into our lives. What God offers us is truly a gift!

This passage from Romans is a challenging one, and one that I think has been misused and misinterpreted over the years. In the Tuesday reflection discussion, one member pointed out that often the emphasis in the last verse is on the first part of the verse and not the last. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." What is challenging in this passage is how we define sin and how we define slavery. Both of these words have been used to harm and control others. For centuries we have been taught that sin is bad. We have heard from religious leaders that we are sinner and need to clean up our lives in order to obtain salvation and grace. AND YET...we hear that grace and eternal life is a GIFT from God. A gift that does not require anything. The passage even asks the question: If we have been given grace- should we sin because we have a free pass? The answer is by no means! Just because we are forgiven and loved unconditionally does not mean that we can simply do whatever we feel like. One of the commentaries explained that: "Paul understands sin as a realm of power, more than capable of ensnaring and enslaving human beings...Paul views sin as virtually a personal power, set up in competition with the power of God...Freedom from sin

is being liberated from a real and dangerous force.”<sup>2</sup> P. 385. Paul is speaking about two competing powers God and sin. The definition of sin that I have found in my studies is the this – sin is that which separates us from the love of God. Coming to worship each Sunday is a ritual of recommitting ourselves to God. When we worship we not only offer God praise, but we offer, yield and present ourselves to God. In this sacred space we welcome God into our beings, into our lives, in our relationships. Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote “Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will. To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.” This is the way of humans. The way of the divine is quite different. In the passage from Romans we are asked to present ourselves to God. We are asked to yield, offer or give ourselves to God. When we yield to God we are embraced in deep hospitality, we are embraced in the love of God and we receive the free gift of God that being eternal life. Knowing that we are loved and are give grace from God as a gift, how will we practice radical hospitality? How will we be affirming of all of God’s creation? How will we help to honour all the gifts that have been given by God to each and everyone of us and to the people who are not yet present? How will we reach out to both friend and stranger so that we can feel God’s present in and among us?

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<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, Charles B. Cousar, Beverly R. Gaventa, James D. Newsome, *Texts for Preaching; A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year A*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), p. 385.