

Matthew 10:40-11:1
Sermon June 21, 2020
Rev. Kristie Webb Finley

As I was preparing to write this sermon, dealing with the fate of what the common lectionary drops in our lap each season, each week, I had the itch at the edges of my memory that I had done this before. Remember that I may not look it, but I am a green pastor. I don't have a file cabinet of sermons that I can turn to during a hectic time, or one that none of you might have heard. So, imagine my shock to see that I have preached on this, and here! It was the first sermon I preached here as an interim. It was during our season of looking for connection. At that time the congregation was yearning for connection, to reconnect after all you had recently been through. This is a clear reminder that the lectionary hasn't change in three years, but I think we all can say that our lives and our world most definitely has.

Though so much has changed, the desire to connect has not. We literally have been separated from each other in a way that we could have never imagined. We crave the physical company of our friends and family. We have come to truly know what it means to be parted, and for many isolated.

I think this has allowed us to understand and be open to what is happening today. We are open to and able to empathize, not only have compassion, for those in the world who have felt shut out, who have never felt a part of the gathered community of our nation.

Things go around, and we are told everything comes back around. Even the Bible tells us in Ecclesiastes, that there is nothing new under the sun.

But, today is new. The world has seen pandemics before, but no one has ever witnessed it in real time across the globe as we have. There have been calls for social reform, but never on the scale we are seeing today, globally and nationally. We have watched people die before our very eyes, both in the hospital surrounded by nurses and doctors covered from head to toe in PPE fighting COVID19, and on the pavement surrounded by police under an officer's knee. Both horrify us. The first demands that we stand outside and watch, the second demands us to step in and act. Some say that the protests are so large, because we have been stuck inside with nothing to do, bored, and now we can get out. But, I hope, I pray, that it is much more than boredom that causes us to act. My hope is that our hearts have been opened and stirred by the Holy Spirit.

In this passage we hear Jesus giving the disciples instructions on their mission. Insight on being welcomed as a prophet, or a righteous person, and even when offered a cup of cold water. But, we can also look at this as how we welcome the prophet, the righteous, or those in need. Today we see them all in the streets, shoulder to shoulder. Where do we see and hear the prophetic voices? Where do we see the righteous? Where are we seeing the little ones, those who are vulnerable?

The mission of the First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest is to send well-equipped disciples of Jesus into the world—compassionate, generous, resilient and wise. So, those instructions Jesus gives his disciples, are given to us as well. When we move out to spread the love of Jesus, we are Christ to those we encounter, and they are Christ for us.

Matthew 10:40-11:1
Sermon June 21, 2020
Rev. Kristie Webb Finley

Mother Teresa reminds us that we “encounter Christ in distressing disguise, hungry not only for bread, but hungry for love; naked not only for clothing but naked of human dignity and respect; homeless not only for want of a room of bricks, but homeless because of rejection.” As disciples, strangers encounter Christ in us, but we also encounter Christ in the stranger. Many of those strangers we are seeing and encountering today are young people, another unexpected surprise.

I am especially grateful to Susanna Noble, a recent Lake Forest High School graduate, for accepting the invitation to join us today. Hers is the generation we are seeing as prophetic and righteous offering us a welcome to join in the change.

SUSANNA

On Father’s Day we reflect on the welcome our fathers offered us. My father formed my vision of hospitality and welcome. The gift of his hospitality and unconditional love created the framework through which I formed my vision of God. I could embrace a God of radical unconditional love because that is how I first experienced love as a child.

With God we should not be surprised that we find the unexpected in what we receive from welcoming strangers. From the Old Testament, in Joshua, consider the story of Rahab the prostitute. By welcoming the Hebrew spies, and protecting them, she received the gift of faith. In the beginning of Matthew, she is listed in the genealogy of Jesus, and is one of the few women in the Bible who is named at all.

If we are looking for a present day example of surprising welcome, consider Rahul Dubey, a man living in Washington DC who welcomed protesters into his home three weeks ago. As the curfew approached, the protesters were trying to get home, but the street was blocked at both ends. As the police were closing in on the protesters, using pepper spray, Mr. Dubey opened his door and shepherded them in. He had been allowing the protesters to charge their phones from his front porch throughout the day, and now he hurried almost 70 into his apt to avoid arrest. These were young peaceful protestors. He kept them in his house overnight and fed them, ordering pizza, along with neighbors bringing food. They stayed for 9 hours. At this time, when we are not to let anyone in, especially strangers because of COVID19, this man let in 70. He surprised himself, the young people, and us.

Let’s listen to our last verse again, “Now when Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and proclaim his message to their cities.” Jesus left them, he had given them what they needed / to do the ministry he had called them to, and **he** continued on. He trusted that they would do the work, as he instructed. He did not second guess, or follow after them to make sure they were doing it correctly. If we are equipping each other to go out and follow our call, why are we afraid? Christ went with them, he goes with us. When we welcome and represent Christ to the stranger, the surprise gift of encountering Christ in that stranger is that our mission is **reinforced**. We are **reminded** that there is more to learn about our brothers and sisters, that the stranger has something to teach us. To know that we are called to receive this gift of the Christ we discover in the stranger, and allow it to change us

Matthew 10:40-11:1
Sermon June 21, 2020
Rev. Kristie Webb Finley

as well. If during this time we do not allow God to continue molding us, if we don't reach out and embrace the new, then we will reconnect with each other in a few months and be disappointed when things do not return as before. Then we will miss the gift of growth God offers us.

Can we use this time, this time when we are not **in** the church to go out **into being** the church? To be the missional people God calls us to be over and over? Rarely if ever, do we hear God say "Stay right where you are, don't move." God was always telling and leading the people, and now us, to move, move out. There is no other way to encounter the stranger then to move out into the world to welcome, and be welcomed, to be surprised by what we receive and to see the amazing ways God is using us.