

## **The 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost 07/02/2023**

It is good to be here with you. The last few weeks have been a whirlwind and there is more to come. I could not be here preaching this morning without your help. You have made me feel welcome by extending your hospitality.

You have shared the marks of the kingdom – hospitality and the down-home cup of water, cleaning my new house and painting it. I have received great hospitality from Mike who has welcomed me into his home and provided me with food and fellowship. Mike is a good cook too. My challenge this week has been to receive it.

In our Gospel lesson today, we are at the end of Matthew's discourse on discipleship. We hear Jesus saying to his disciples, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." Think about that for a moment, when we welcome someone we are welcoming Jesus and God. This is not only about welcoming someone, but it is also about receiving someone's welcome. Giving and receiving Jesus and God.

Jesus is teaching his disciples and now us, that we are called to share Jesus and God with our neighbor and to receive Jesus and God from our neighbor. I believe in the end it is the Holy Spirit who draws us together into this beloved community. We cannot fully be Jesus and God, but with the help of the Holy Spirit we can give and receive Jesus and God.

I have tried to be gracious this past week and receive your welcome, your hospitality and cup of water. You can tell me how I did on the way out. I would not have come here if I did not feel God in Jesus Christ calling me here. They are the ones who have continued to work things out through you and many others.

To be able to sell a house and buy a house in this amount of time is divine intervention. It is a bit daunting to come to a new place and start over again without your spouse. After my closing in East Lansing this past week, it hit me that John is not physically with me. I do believe he is emotionally and spiritually with me. Thankfully I have many friends and I reached out to someone who lost his husband last August and is getting ready to move. I am viewing this connection as another receiving of Jesus and God.

Receiving a welcome, hospitality and a cup of cold water then is about trust. I have continued to take one step at a time, maybe a few more at a time, believing and trusting that this is God's plan for me and you. There have been times that I have doubted and wondered if I really wanted to continue on. Moving and starting

over again is not for the faint of heart. All along the way I have had encouragement through word and deed.

Jesus goes on to say, “Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward.” As a pastor I am called to be prophetic. This does not mean that I am here to tell you what will happen in the future. It does mean that I am here to challenge you, to ask you hard questions, to help you discover again “Who you are, Who your neighbor is and what is God calling you to do.

In the end it is about discovering truth. Without truth we cannot do God’s will. The truth is not always comfortable, but in order to grow in our individual and corporate faith it is necessary to discover truth. Thankfully the Holy Spirit will help us to do this.

Throughout this next year I will work with a transition team. I say a transition team rather than a call committee as a call committee needs what is called a Ministry Site Profile in order to do their work. The transition team will develop a plan to help the congregation answer these three questions. Who are we, who is our neighbor, and what is God calling us to do.

When we are able to answer these questions to the best of our ability at this time, we will have what we need to write the Ministry Site Profile. In a sense it will be Faith’s resume. This will be done through congregational events, examining what is working and what might not be working and praying for the Holy Spirit to help us discern what God has in store for Faith.

We find in scripture that prophets were not always welcome and often faced ridicule, rejection and death. Was this their reward? Seeking truth does not always make us popular. Prophets were called to point out the truth to those who had gone their own way. I will point out what I see and hear, but together we will discern with the help of Holy Spirit the truth.

When human beings become tired and frustrated, we turn inward and try and do it on our own. At this point the truth becomes more difficult to discern. Part of this next year will be decreasing anxiety in order to be able to discern more clearly God’s plan for Faith.

You may ask, how will we do this? By continuing to do what you have been doing. Connie and I are working with the staff on assessing the systems in our administration to make sure they are more user friendly and efficient. Even though I am not Pastor Ellen and will not be doing things exactly the same way, worship will continue and pastoral care along with all of the ministries will continue on.

We have strong lay leadership here at Faith. This is how you have continued on since Pastor Ellen and Katie left. I am not here to run every area of the church

as there are capable people doing ministry here already. I will ask a lot of questions and may make suggestions.

Asking questions of ourselves and this community will cause anxiety. As disciples Jesus is telling us along with the disciples in our Gospel lesson that we are called to accept questions and peoples' response to them. Even though they may make us feel uncomfortable, it may be Jesus and God speaking to us. Our challenge will be to give and receive Jesus and God.

Once again the signs of the kingdom are hospitality and giving that cold cup of water. Thus, Jesus is saying, I believe that as we go through this process of transition and discerning God's will for Faith that there will be times that challenge us to think and do things differently. Once again the Holy Spirit is here to assist us through this time of transition and discernment.

Our coming together as pastor and congregation, this beloved community, is a time of testing out this discipleship that Jesus is talking about. How do we give and receive Jesus and God? We may say and do things that challenge our way of thinking and doing. What Jesus is looking for is how we do this inside and outside of our beloved community.

Do we give and receive Jesus and God with hospitality and a cup of water, the signs of the kingdom that Jesus is looking for?