

Let me tell you about Friday Night Live. When we first imagined an alternative gathering on Friday night, we had no idea what we would expect. There are certainly models of evening worship services that we could have followed but we knew we wanted to speak to people for whom the ancient language and practices of a worshipping Christian community were barriers for people trying to find a way onto a spiritual path. So Friday Night Live feels like a brand new thing...and it will take some time to find its audience, to find its form and to find its content.

I do want to say that before each event, I have the most lively theological conversations with Alan Marriott, the artistic director of AddLibretto – the cast that we have contracted to lead the event. He and I talk about what Sunday's theme will be as a way for him to prepare for Friday. We've always agreed that good worship has elements of good theatre. And Friday Night Live is an attempt for us to make good theatre, good worship. This past week, the text he got was the text that Marion just read. And theme that grew out of our discussion was a question – what would we give our lives to that brings complete satisfaction? (repeat)

For me, Friday's event came really close to achieving what it is we're trying to achieve. It was good theatre that became good worship. There were some really tender moments that came to addressing the question "what would we give our lives to that brings complete satisfaction? But the story of the night, didn't really get told, we just experienced something extraordinary.

Our guest artist was jazz pianist Jacob Aginsky. He was a brilliant piano player. I learned later that Jacob has given up his life as a successful touring jazz musician to be the sole parent of his daughter. We didn't know this of course, but we did get to witness Jacob's complete satisfaction. He played three times on Friday night. Two of those times he played songs he'd written with his daughter. And while Jacob played and sang into the microphone, from across the sanctuary in the front row, we could hear his daughter sing every word with him. "What would we give our lives to that brings complete satisfaction?" Indeed.

The text that Marion read for us this morning is the tail end of the instructions that Jesus gives to his disciples before he sends them on a mission trip – out into the towns and villages that he himself intended to go, but for reasons unknown was unable. Rather, he sent his "envoys" the ones to whom he gave authority to speak on his behalf. Envoys in biblical times had tremendous power for they carried the full authority of the ones they represented. Most of the letters in the new testament were likely carried and read by someone who had been given authority to speak for the author.

In their marching orders, Jesus tells the disciples to travel lightly. He says to them, as you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick,

raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it that household. Let your peace come upon it; if it does not receive that peace, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town.”

Jesus knew that the disciples would meet people who will cling to their ancestral and tribal families, clinging to the traditions and the practices and the customs that may bind them, rather than set them free. So he said: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

They sound like harsh words and truly, scholars question whether this is a case of Matthew putting words into Jesus’ mouth to advance his own theological agenda. Could be true. I do believe Matthew’s point is that a new life found on the path of following Jesus is exactly that, a new path. It will eventually separate us from those who do not follow...it’s a natural progression, a natural evolution. The deeper we become involved in anything to which we give our lives to, the more we make choices about who is in our life. When you give up the path to be a concert jazz pianist to become primary caregiver for your daughter, choices are made about whose company you keep. “Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

In the final instruction before they leave, Jesus says most importantly – greet people where they are. Don’t set before them an agenda that is outside of their need. Greet prophets as prophets. Greet teachers as teachers. Greet righteous people as righteous people. And the person who is thirsty, greet him with a cup of cold water. Meet everyone where they are.

That’s what we’re trying to do with Friday Night Live. Greet people where they are. We’re not laying on a theological or liturgical agenda. We’re attempting to greet them with good theatre, compelling, improvisational theatre that has the potential to take

people (if they'll go) into good worship, so that they might wonder about what it means to live the spiritual life.

I want to finish this morning by speaking quite personally. Over the past nearly two years, I have watched the people of this place give their lives for the sake of the gospel and the return is nothing short of astounding. Life is being regenerated in ways we could not have imagined, relationships are being restored, ministries are being discovered, spiritual gifts are being newly commissioned; somethin' really is happening here.

Many of you have expressed an earnest concern for my well being. Some of wonder if I'm looking tired. Some of you have noticed that I have lost weight. Some of you are wondering if I'm burning out, for the sake of the gospel. I want to thank you all for your compassionate concern, and I want to tell you about my experience.

When I came here in October 2009, I had no idea I would be coming to what has been and continues to be the richest, most rewarding experience of leadership I have ever had. I had no idea I would be working with people of such creativity, compassion, love and generosity. I had no idea that people would let me into their lives with such hospitality and openness, that I would witness extraordinary moments in which I would be compelled to take off my shoes.

Certainly I'm a little tired. We have implemented four new spending initiatives, a constitution reform committee, three new ministry teams, a hiring process, a renovation of the sanctuary and launched a special fundraising campaign all within the past six months. But this is a fatigue that leaves me feeling exhilarated – not unlike Jason Haight after he ran the Boston Marathon.

I tell my friends, my colleagues, my family – this is the most important work I will do in my career. I'm working with the most interesting, most courageous, most loving congregation anyone could work with. Certainly I've made mistakes. I'm grateful for your forgiveness as I've tried to correct them. I'm continually learning how to implement policy governance. I'm preaching more honestly than I ever have in my life. I'm exploring the depths of our tradition in ways I least expected. I'm in the prime of my ministry and I feel blessed beyond measure. And if I lose a little weight – friends, trust me, I was looking like I had an addition to cheap chocolate.

Those who lose their lives for the sake of the gospel will find it. Its not happening just to me, friends, I see people living transformed lives all throughout our community. For the gifts of this word of hope, let us be forever grateful Amen.