



Pioneer Pastoral Charge
9:30 a.m. Cereal United Church
11:15 a.m. Oyen United Church
Sunday June 25, 2017
3rd Sunday after Pentecost
Adapted by: Rev. Helen Reed, Diaconal
Minister

Please Stand As You Are Able

We Gather As People Of God

Prelude, Welcome & Announcements

Minutes for Mission

Lighting the Christ Candle

We light the Christ Candle, aware of God around, among, & within us. In a moment of silence, we prepare ourselves to celebrate God's presence in our community.

□ ***Gathering song: ♪ MV#14 - When two or three are gathered...***

Call to Worship

Welcome to all who are weary, tired, or burned-out
We come to be refreshed and renewed in God's presence.

Welcome to all who are anxious, worried, or burdened.

We come to be calmed and comforted by the Spirit.

Welcome to all who feel complacent, comfortable, or detached.

We come to be stirred by Christ's message for us.

All are welcome here. Come as you are.

**Together, we will rest in God's presence,
be calmed by the Spirit,
and be stirred by Christ's message.**

**Together we will welcome one another
as we gather for worship.**

Prayer of Approach

Holy One,

You hold us in your warm embrace.

**You welcome each of us exactly as we are,
and you hold us close to you.**

**Your love gathers all of us
into a community that you have created.**

**And yet, in your community
there is always room for more.**

You teach us to welcome one another.

**We are thankful that with you, each of us has a
place,**

And each one of us can find a welcome home.

Amen.

☐ *Hymn:* 🎵 MV#1 - Let us build a house

Prayer for Grace:

Creator God,

**Even though you have taught us what it means
to welcome,**

and you have shown us a beautiful and beloved community where there is room for all, Sometimes we create our own closed communities.

We exclude others because of who they are, or what they believe.

We think that our way is a better way than others ways.

We don't want to find things in common with, or love,

others who are different from us.

We become so comfortable in our lives, that we don't want to be uncomfortable by welcoming people and ideas from beyond our doors.

We do not welcome one another as you have welcomed us.

Forgive us God.

Words of Assurance:

We need fresh courage and determination to live up to our calling to be a welcoming community.

As we look to the always present love of God, the guiding words and actions in the life of Jesus, the strength given to us in the Spirit that surrounds us in our family and friends, we will find courage, determination, pardon and peace. Thanks be to God

Scripture Reading:

Luke 9:51-62

Common English Bible

Jesus sets out for Jerusalem

51 As the time approached when Jesus was to be taken up into heaven, he determined to go to Jerusalem. 52 He sent messengers on ahead of him. Along the way, they entered a Samaritan village to prepare for his arrival, 53 but the Samaritan villagers refused to welcome him because he was determined to go to Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to consume them?” 55 But Jesus turned and spoke sternly to them, 56 and they went on to another village.

Following Jesus

57 As Jesus and his disciples traveled along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

58 Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and the birds in the sky have nests, but the Human One[a] has no place to lay his head.”

59 Then Jesus said to someone else, “Follow me.” He replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

60 Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead. But you go and spread the news of God’s kingdom.”

61 Someone else said to Jesus, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those in my house.”

62 Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand on the plow and looks back is fit for God’s kingdom.”

***Message/Reflections: Truth in Advertising –
Debi Thomas***

☐ ***Hymn:*** 🎵 **Come let us sing - VU #222**

Offering Invitation

How do we offer our welcome to God’s people in the world?

We are called to love as God has loved, to give all that we can so that others may reach their potential. We welcome by providing a place of peace and sanctuary, we welcome by offering our hospitality, we welcome by offering our compassion to those in difficulty.

We do all this with the time, talent and treasure that we give for God’s welcome in the world.

Prayer of Dedication

God, you offer us welcome beyond our wildest dreams.

In comparison, the gifts that we offer today are small, but we know that you can fill them with the power and strength to make the dreams of others come true. May it be so. Amen.

☐ ***Hymn:*** 🎵 **What can I do? MV191**

Pastoral Prayers

Creator God,

You have shown us what it means to welcome one another.

You give us love and direction in all circumstances.

We call your name and you are there waiting for us, loving us.

We give you thanks for your invitation,
your presence, your welcome.

We take a moment to look at the world around us
and see that there are many who need to be
welcomed into the world.

There are many who are poor,
There are many who are hungry
There are many who are homeless,
There are many who live with violence,
There are many who live with illness.

We pray for all of these.

May they feel welcomed

as we provide them with food

as we help them find shelter,

as we offer them safety

and gently push back against the need for violence

as we offer compassion and care in their time of
need.

(a moment of silence)

We pray for those who have taken on the mantle of
power.

May they not succumb to the temptation of power that can twist their thinking and drag them into selfishness, carelessness and callousness.

May they remember their responsibility to provide hospitality for the earth and the people under their care.

(a moment of silence)

We pray for those who grieve. While we know that you welcome our loved ones with open arms, we often feel lost and alone in our mourning. May all those who have lost loved ones feel the welcoming balm of your compassion and love on their journey.

(a moment of silence)

We pray for ourselves. May we always hear your call to offer welcome to all people of the world. May we remember our commitment to you to follow your direction and to trust that you will be with us on the journey. May our hearts welcome your love that will make our spirit whole.

Let us sing together the words that Jesus taught us, remembering that in accepting the covenant of welcome that God offers us, we have the responsibility to reflect that same welcome to the world...

The Lord's Prayer... VU959

Blessing/Sending Forth

**As we leave this place,
let us go with God's welcome
warming our hearts
and written on our faces
so that God's love will shine on the world
through us.**

Changing the Christ Candle

**☐ *Closing Hymn: ♪ VU #664 What A Friend We
Have in Jesus***

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If Jesus went to business school and majored in marketing, he would flunk out his first semester. Why? Because he's a rotten salesman.

As this week's Gospel reading from Luke makes clear, Jesus is perfectly indifferent to the rules of good salesmanship. He doesn't wrap his product in slick packaging. He doesn't minimize costs to attract more customers. He doesn't hide the hard stuff in fine print. He never rushes his pitch to close a deal. If anything, he does the bizarre opposite: he takes pains to push potential buyers away. "I'll follow you!" an eager customer gushes. "Oh, good grief, no you won't," Jesus groans in response. "You have no clue what you're talking about."

Jesus takes "truth in advertising" to such an extreme level that we, his Church, would do well to consider what version of Christianity we're "selling" to those who walk through our doors. Is it Jesus's version? Or is it a lukewarm, low-risk version we've custom-designed to keep our pews from emptying?

The challenge of this week's lectionary is this: if we want a way of life that's soft and cuddly, Jesus's way isn't it. If we want a God who will respect our priorities; honor our social, cultural, and economic boundaries; and keep our lives neat and orderly, Jesus is not that God. If we want a spirituality that's comfortable rather than costly, and stable rather than transformative, we should walk away now. Because Jesus's face is set like stone for

Jerusalem. For sacrifice. For the cross. Yes, he bids us to follow. Of course he does.

Luke records four interactions between Jesus and his would-be followers in this week's lectionary. Each interaction offers us a challenging bit of truth-in-advertising about the kingdom of God. Do we really want to know what Jesus is selling? Okay, take a deep breath. Here we go:

First, he's selling rejection and patience. The Gospel passage opens with a group of Samaritans refusing to welcome Jesus into their village. Though Jesus expresses a desire to minister, teach, and heal in their midst, the villagers reject him outright. When James and John hear the news, they offer to burn the offending village to the ground. But Jesus "turns and rebukes them."

I don't think many of us are in danger of burning down villages. But are we in danger of leading with anger rather than love when people disagree with us? Are we in danger of favoring resentment over kindness when our feelings get hurt or our egos get bruised? Jesus rebukes James and John because they allow their supposed loyalty to Jesus — their spiritual zeal and fervor — to cloud their judgment and gnarl their hearts.

The call, Jesus reminds them, is to bring life, not death — even to those who reject and insult us. The call is to practice forgiveness and forbearance,

never retribution and revenge. The call is to face each other gently and with great patience, because even the people who make our blood boil are precious to God.

Rejection, Jesus seems to suggest in this exchange, is a given. Wounded feelings are par for the course along the road to Jerusalem. What matters is how we respond when we are wounded. What matters is whether love or hatred ultimately governs our hearts.

Second, Jesus is selling inconvenience and hardship. As Jesus continues his journey, a passerby calls out to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” But Jesus says to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

Is this an advertisement for homelessness? Maybe. For sure, it’s an advertisement for inconvenience. Jesus offers no guarantee that the Christian life will be easy and comfortable. He never promises his followers a fat bank account, a posh career, a fancy postal code, or a three-car garage. If anything, he promises the opposite: a reordering of our priorities (professional, financial, and geographical), that will feel risky and disrupting. A surrender of our most prized possessions and preferences. A willingness to depend on the goodwill and generosity of others. An identity that isn’t defined by the stuff we own, the

clothes we wear, the degrees we earn, the neighborhood we live in, the company we keep, the awards we accumulate, or the cars we drive. A life that is messier, grittier, and humbler than the one we curate so carefully on Facebook.

The temptation here is to leap too quickly to metaphor. Surely, we want to tell ourselves, Jesus isn't talking about our actual material lives. He's not indicting consumerism. He's not criticizing literal privilege. Is he? Well, here's the thing: the Son of Man, the Creator of the universe, God incarnate, spent his adult life homeless. No matter how squirmy and defensive this fact makes us feel, we need to sit with it, and ponder what it means for our everyday lives.

Third, Jesus is selling disruption and disorientation. Soon after Jesus tunes on the foxes and the birds, he invites another passerby to follow him. The man responds, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus says, "Let the dead bury their own dead; as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Okay, I won't mince words: I don't like this Jesus. He sounds so harsh! So insensitive! Whatever happened to family values? "Let the dead bury their own dead!?" What does Jesus have against funerals?

I wonder if what's "for sale" here is a testing of all of our loyalties. Maybe the point is that Christian

discipleship requires a degree of detachment from every other commitment we have — to family, to tradition, to culture, to reputation, to social norms and expectations. These are important, of course, and they have their place, but they are not primary. Jesus is primary. Or, he should be.

His harsh-sounding words to the would-be follower suggest that there will be times when our faith requires us to violate cultural norms, or disappoint our families, or move against the grain of the broader society we live in. If we have a burning need to fit in, to be popular, and to conform at all times to our peers' expectations, then we cannot follow Jesus. Discipleship will disorient and disrupt us. It will make us the neighborhood weirdos. It will shake things up in our families and friendship circles. It will challenge the status quo. Are we still interested?

Lastly, Jesus is selling intensity and urgency. As our lection draws to a close, one more traveler on the road offers to follow Jesus: "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus's response? "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Yeah, ouch. We can't even say goodbye? Well, no. Not if it causes us to hesitate. Not if it takes away our sense of urgency for the Gospel and for the world God loves.

Can I even count how many times I've offered Jesus a version of this last excuse? "Sure, Lord, I'll follow you! I'll give you everything I've got, I promise. But, um, not right now. Later. After I..."

After I what? After I finish these last few super important projects. After I find a spouse. And lose twenty pounds. And get over my dysfunctional past. And finish raising my kids. And spend a few more years cozying up to my boss. And get a raise. And buy a house. And retire. And turn forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty....

The list is endless, and that's precisely Jesus's point. If our to-do list ends with Jesus instead of beginning with Jesus, we'll never get to Jesus at all. If we keep glancing over our shoulders in nostalgia instead of fixing our eyes on what lies ahead, we'll never step onto the road that leads to Jerusalem. Spiritual fitness requires a sense of urgency and passion. A sense of the sacred, irreplaceable value of right now.

Just to name the obvious: this is a hard Gospel reading. It's confrontational. It's demanding. It's offensive. In it, Jesus asks us to surrender absolutely everything, and he does so without apology. In fact, he gives the people around him every possible reason to say no. So why would anyone say yes? Why would anyone close a deal with Jesus on these appalling terms?

Because these are the terms we were created for, and Jesus knows it. Jesus the rotten salesman knows the cure for our discontent, our boredom, our hunger. He knows how deep calls to deep within our restless souls, how something unrelenting in us aches for a life of purpose, a life of meaning, a life we can pour out in love until we are spent and reborn. This is the life of the Holy Spirit within us — a life no advertisement can capture.

Jesus is hard on us because he knows that our hearts cry out for transformation. For renewal. For resurrection. Nothing else we buy will suffice. Nothing else the world sells can compare. So Jesus bids us to come and die. So that we can really live.

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