

Peace Works:

A Spring-Into-Life Worship Series for Such a Time as This

“Meeting the Holy at the Table” -- Aloha

Season of Eastertide, Sunday, May 5, 2019

Sermon for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Decatur, Georgia

10:30 AM Worship with Open Communion

Preaching: The Rev. Dr. James Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Luke 14: 15-24; 24: 13-16, 28-35

Luke 14:15-24 (NRSV) -- The Parable of the Great Banquet

¹⁵ One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” ¹⁶ Then Jesus said to him, “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. ¹⁷ At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’ ¹⁸ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’ ¹⁹ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ ²⁰ Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’ ²¹ So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ ²² And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’ ²³ Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’”

Luke 24: 13-16, 28-35 (NRSV) -- The Walk to Emmaus

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

²⁸ As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them. ³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³² They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” ³³ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ³⁴ They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” ³⁵ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Aloha!
Bienvenidos!
Kon'nichiwa!
As-salāmu ‘alaykum!
Hodi!
G’day Mate!
Welcome home!
Arnold Glasow said, *“Some folks make you feel at home.
Others make you wish you were.”*

Aloha is a fascinating word.
*“Aloha [is a Hawaiian word that] means hello, goodbye, welcome, and love.
Each of these aspects of aloha are shown through people and nature.
Through people we always aim to show love and respect
whether you are from Hawaii or not.
This is why Hawaiian people think of each other as family;
we are all worthy of respect, and it’s important to show that [respect].
This is also why we [the whole people of God]
have such a strong desire to show hospitality as well.
It’s all about love and respect for each other and being an example of that.
The same respect and love are shown for the island [of Hawaii]
and all living things on it.”^[1]*

Aloha!
Welcome home.
No kidding. We mean it.
Turn to a neighbor near you and say, *“Aloha! Welcome home!”*

We truly want you to feel and know that you are welcome here,
that this is your home whether for one Sunday morning of hope
or for a lifetime of service and lots more hope.
A strong and solid pastoral theme runs through this congregation,
one that has sustained countless of souls for the journey of life.

Did you hear the story of the visitor from Maine who came down to Georgia?
She arrived at Christmastime, and admired a Nativity Scene on a church lawn,
but was surprised to see fire fighter helmets on the Three Wise Men.
She walked inside the church and asked a member
why they had fire fighter helmets atop their crowns.
Instead of being hospitable, however, the church member got huffy.
“Don’t you read your Bible?” She flipped it open and pointed.
“It says right here: ‘Three wise men came from afar.’”

You and yours are welcome here.

You and I will be received without judgment,

 simply, purely, happily because we are all guests at the Lord's Table.

Hopefully, prayerfully, everything we do and offer in worship

 leads us to the Table of the Lord,

 where we are invited to encounter the Holy,

 where we are fed and sustained,

 where we are reminded of the forgiving love of God,

 where we are reconciled to Christ and each other,

 where we serve each other as Christ first served us,

 where we are empowered for the journey ahead.

The Lord's Table is a welcome place

 and a welcoming place for one and all.

As a matter of fact,

 it seems like every time you or I open the Gospels there is Jesus,

 either on his way to a table,

 coming from a table,

 or sitting at a table.

Sometimes he is making invitations to the table,

 and sometimes he is breaking bread with folks on the margins,

 or telling the hosts to add a place or two,

 to make room for Elijah.

In Luke 14, the earthly Jesus tells a parable about the nature of God's love.

We human beings wrestle with getting a handle

 on who God is, the loving activity of God, and where we come into the picture.

So, drawing on his gifts for storytelling and painting pictures with words,

 Jesus of Nazareth used the imagery a great banquet spread out on a table

 and a happy host eager to make people welcome.

The host gets everything all set:

 the food is hot, refreshments poured, violins in tune.

Then the host invites friends and neighbors to come in for the banquet.

Some make excuses why they cannot come.

"I have bought a piece of land," said one,

"and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets."

"I have bought five yoke of oxen," said another,

"and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets."

"I have just been married,

and therefore I cannot come," said a third.

So, says Jesus, the host looks outside and tells his servant,

"Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town

and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame."

Later the servant said,

“What you ordered has been done, and there is still room.”

Then the host said,

*“Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in,
so that my house may be filled.”*

The nature and nurture of God are experienced in many wonderful ways;
at the core is God’s practice of hospitality.

You belong.

You are welcome.

You are invited.

Come as you are to the Great Banquet!

The invitation is extended.

If for any reason it’s refused, ignored, declined, delayed, denied,
the invitation is not rescinded; it is always open.

However, don’t ever think you are the only one invited to the party, to the banquet.
More invitations will be extended.

The circle will be widened, extra chairs set up, room made available at God’s table.

That was the earthly Jesus’ tale.

Does life after life change the ethos of Christ?

In Luke 24, after God raised and resurrected Jesus from the dead into new life,
into a New Reality,
Jesus met two disciples leaving Jerusalem.

They did not recognize him, their Rabbi, their Teacher, their Friend.

Honestly, this is a mysterious scripture that makes total sense to me.

Sometimes, my friends, when we are made new,
when we are changed from the inside out,
when we are transformed by the love of God into a New Reality,
we may become unrecognizable,
unrecognizable even to those who have known us for a while.

Such is the power of God’s love to transform.

We’ve left behind old ways and old pains, let go of old baggage and old attitudes,
and taken on a New Reality, becoming a New Being.

The two disciples invited the stranger to stay with them,
to dine with them, to share a humble meal with them.

They welcomed a stranger into their life, practicing authentic hospitality.

When at the table, Jesus took the bread and blessed it.

The disciples recognized Jesus by his own act of hospitality.

And then, and then He was gone.

They ran back to Jerusalem and told their friends what happened, saying,
 "And did not our hearts burn when He was talking with us."
They went on about how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

God makes Godself known to us in the breaking of bread.
Our hearts burn from God's teaching and speaking, message and music of love.

As grateful as we are when God welcomes us home,
 inviting us to God's table of grace,
 imagine how grateful God is
 when we do the same,
 when we practice authentic hospitality,
 a practice that makes way for peace.

Aloha! We crave authentic *alohas* on a daily basis.
Our community, our city, our nation, our world share in common a deep hunger.
We crave peace.
We have this hunger for real peace.
Not a vague, empty peace that's simply the absence of conflict;
 we crave a peace that's the presence of justice.
We want a peace with meaning, one that we feel a part of, that all may be a part of.
Peace is made real and tangible and present through relationships,
 relationships between friends and neighbors,
 between strangers who will become friends,
 between tribes, groups and, yes, nations that seek common ground.
We have this vision, this hope for peace, peacemaking, and making peacemakers.
Someone once said:

"When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace."

 That quote is attributed to Jimi Hendrix!

Yet to get to peace, to grow peace, to prove that peace works,
 we begin with hospitality.
I like to think this is what Mother Theresa was thinking when she observed, *"Peace begins with a smile."*
Saying welcome home is a good start;
 going out of your way to make welcoming real
 makes all the difference in the world.

Imagine peace as the good fruit that grows out of healthy branches;
 the tree roots are grounded in God's grace and love;
 and the trunk that connects the two is true hospitality.
The good fruits of peace and peacemaking
 blossom and ripen after--and only after--we enable people to feel welcome,
 seen, heard, recognized, respected, received,
 to know they are known by us as they are known by God.

We are intentional in our hope to plant peacemakers.

Planting peacemakers is never by luck.

They are created with planning and practice and patience.

This reminds us of the young man who wrote a great big book called

“The Ten Commandments of Raising Children”

Then he got married and had a baby, and wrote a book called

“Ten Suggestions for Raising Children”

Then he had several more children and wrote a very small book called

“Ten Hints for Raising Children”

Teachable moments present themselves to you; take advantage of them.

The Holy Spirit provides you with blessed opportunities to teach peace,

to seek out and practice alternatives to violence.

My father George Calvert was both a preacher and a teacher.

When teaching middle school,

he encountered a 13-year-old boy who had a full beard.

“Mr. Calvert, kids are always teasing me,” he said to his teacher.

“They call me Wolfman. The next one who does, I am going to hit him.”

George listened, took him seriously, and advised him to laugh with the group,

to go along with it,

because calling him Wolfman would then cease to be funny to them.

So, he did, and they did.

Very soon what seemed so funny wasn't anymore.

Dignity restored; violent reprisals averted; peace reigned.

We have learned that everyone can do something, whether great or small.

When we work and serve and play together,

there is no limit to God's hospitality offered to the world through us.

In 1977, one of my brothers, David,

was interning at the World Council of Churches in Geneva

when he met Yushi Nomura, a Japanese Christian in his 20s.

Naturally, David, being a hospitable sort,

told Yushi that when he came state-side he must stay with us in NYC.

So Yushi did, staying six months.

I was in high school at the time, and Yushi became a lifelong friend.

One day he walked in wearing a brand-new blue and white baseball cap.

He proudly showed us the hat he had bought, pointing to his intertwined initials Y & N.

Someone asked him if he was a Yankees fan.

“Who are the Yankees?” he asked.

The Rev. Yushi Nomura passed away last year, leaving a living legacy of an amazing family and a grateful universe of souls shaped and touched by his love for God and God’s people.

Just before he left my childhood home to study for the ministry at Yale Divinity School, he told our church about a dream he had, a dream about true peace.

“I dreamed I went to heaven and hell.

First I went to hell.

*In hell there was a feast laid out on a long table,
overflowing with all the best foods.*

Everyone was given chopsticks that were three feet long.

Every morsel of food fell off the end of the chopsticks before reaching their mouths.

So even though they were in the midst of plenty, they were eternally hungry.

Then I went to heaven.

*In heaven there was a feast laid out on a long table,
overflowing with all the best foods.*

Everyone was given chopsticks that were three feet long.

My goodness, I thought, heaven is just like hell!

Yet when I looked carefully, I saw the difference.

In heaven, people feed their neighbors.”

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

[1](#) “Peace Works” Inside Out: Christian Resources for Outdoor Ministry. Page 11.