

**RADICAL HOSPITALITY**  
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June 28, 2020  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

“The Church has left the building!”

So say our brand new SPC t-shirts tie-dyed by a local artisan.

And, of course, we have.

16 Sundays and counting, we have left the building. And gathered instead on Facebook Live to worship the one triune God, as we say in our proclamation. With Zoom gatherings galore in between.

Even I have not set foot in the sanctuary for weeks. And yet we, the church, have been emphatically engaged in an unbroken stream of ministry and mission, even so.

From our glorious PRIDE Sunday celebration to the amazingly well-attended Youth-led Homewood Express to the less public (but perhaps even more important) phone calls and emails and how-do-you-dos beyond the facemasks when we run into each other at the farmer’s market, we at SPC have, indeed, been practicing the ministry of radical hospitality well beyond the beloved building that has shaped our community.

In fact, our ministry of Radical Hospitality in the spirit of Jesus has been so well-received that yours truly is having trouble keeping up with all of the people who are asking when and how they can join our church for good.

Well done, SPC!

We are learning all over again that the good news of Radical Hospitality, Holistic Spirituality, and Engaged Compassion has never been confined to a building. Not now. And certainly not in the time of Jesus.

Jesus, himself, in our gospel lesson from Matthew this morning, is far from a building. He is, instead, traipsing through the cities and villages of Galilee. Proclaiming the good news of the coming reign of God: the Great Shalom; the Beloved Community. Gathering up a rag tag group of disciples along the way.

By the time we reach the end of Matthew 10, the disciples themselves are commissioned to go off on their own journeys. To represent the message of Jesus by traipsing through even more cities and villages. *On their own.* While Jesus goes off on his own to proclaim that same good news:

God’s Beloved Community is coming!

Change your way of life so you can be part of it!

Well that’s all well and good, we might say two thousand years later. But we are not “traipsing through cities and villages” like the disciples are, like Jesus is. We are stuck in our homes! Staying as safe as we can these past 16 Sundays.

We cannot even go to the post office without fear of catching the virus!

But right there is where the teaching of Jesus to his disciples in this text actually offers the most meaning to us:

“Whoever welcomes you,” Jesus says to the disciples, “welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me,” Jesus continues, “welcomes the one who sent me.”

We in the church are used to thinking of ourselves as the disciples of Jesus. That whatever Jesus says to the disciples, he is also saying to us. But imagine, if you will, that we are *not* the closest disciples of Jesus in this text. Imagine we are the ones in their homes. In the surrounding towns and villages. The ones to whom the message of Jesus is sent. *Through* these disciples. Or, in our case, through the “guides from beyond” that have banged on our door and our television and our internet these 16 Sundays.

We have a choice to make when the message of Jesus comes to us. When the message of changing our way of life in order to participate in God’s Beloved Community comes to us. As we stay in our homes and learn even more about the effect of COVID-19 on “these little ones.” Meaning, in this case, the ones who struggle the most, not just in our country, but around the world.

We have a choice to make when the message of Jesus comes to us. When the message of changing our way of life in order to participate in God’s Beloved Community comes to us. As we stay in our homes and learn even more about the pandemic of racism that plagues our nation and our globe.

We have a choice to make when the message of Jesus comes to us. When the message of changing our way of life in order to participate in God’s Beloved Community comes to us. As we stay in our homes and hear from three guest preachers from three very different walks of life in the weeks to come.

Will we welcome the “new arrival”? That “guide from beyond,” as Rumi calls it? As if our very “being human is a guest house”? Will we open our minds and hearts to what these twin pandemics have to teach us about changing our way of life? Or we will slam shut the door? Turn off the TV? Power down the computer? As an escape from the call to become a new creation in this *Kairos* moment?

If my experience at SPC is any indication of the choice we will make, we will most emphatically choose welcome!

Yes, it is hard to “leave the building” in all of its creature comforts. Yes, it is hard to receive the prophetic witness calling us to change our way of life. Yes, it is hard to hear the call for justice and know that means letting go of our most cherished idols: of property, of security, of national pride.

But here is the reward that comes with openness and receptivity to the new thing God is doing in our midst:

If we truly are willing to practice the radical hospitality of Jesus, even with – and *especially with* - “this crowd of sorrows,” coming in, as the poet Rumi calls them, we may find the very reign of God “clearing [us] out for some new delight.” If we open our minds and hearts to what these twin pandemics have to teach us about changing our way of life, we may very well catch a glimpse of that peaceable kingdom: that Beloved Community in which all has been repaired and all has been forgiven and all has been healed for new life in the peace of Christ. A peace that truly does pass all understanding.

And if we truly are willing to practice the radical hospitality of Jesus, through a church that has emphatically “left the building,” truly I tell you, “none of these will lose that reward.”

Amen.