

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost  
July 4, 2010

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“Whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into the streets and say even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet know this, the Kingdom of God has come near. Whoever listens to you, listens to me; and whoever rejects you, rejects me and rejects the one who sent me.” I think this passage is not unfamiliar to us and I think we have often used this passage as a way to say that for those who don’t receive the message and the mission and who don’t receive the messengers of Jesus that it is tantamount to rejecting God’s self and I think that this text has tended to be used as a way to say we give you an opportunity to hear the message of the “Good News” and if you reject it, it’s intolerable. I would like to suggest today that that is an unfortunate interpretation of this text; I think it’s an interpretation gone a rye and I don’t think that it acknowledges and recognizes the real heart of the issue in this text which I suggest is not a rejection of belief about Jesus and his mission, but I suggest that what this text is really talking about is the imperative of hospitality – of exercising hospitality. And let me share some of my thoughts as we reflect on this passage. The people of God – Israel -- understood themselves to be a nomadic people; their identity was predicated on being nomadic. As people of God they knew that they were prone to wander – if you will; they were people who sought out; they were people who sojourned; they were a pilgrim people – if you will. They were people who traveled and whatever the terrain was, they crossed; whatever their destination they also hoped that God was with them in that journey. The people of God had a -- what Augustine might call a restlessness until they find their rest in God”; a seeking for places and community where they could better fulfill what it meant to be “People of God”; what it meant to be caring, giving people of God. The primal merit of the Jewish People is the Exodus; that they left this land of tyranny and bondage and injustice and made a journey through the wilderness through the desert of that in order to seek a new land, a new place, where they could live more fully as people of God – people of justice and compassion. So Israel understood herself, the People of God understood themselves as people who were nomadic by necessity and also nomadic in character; they are people who move and travel and experience a

certain kind of restlessness until we find our hopes and dreams fulfilled. Of course the ancient culture of that region was indeed nomadic and one of the things that's essential in a nomadic desert culture is that when you come across another traveler who's been traveling across a long distance or whatever and they are in need of water or food or shelter or accommodation of some kind, you provide it. So the hospitality that you provide to either someone familiar or a stranger is essential – sometimes it's a very matter of life and death. So I suggest that this text is addressing a community that understands itself to be a nomadic people -- a nomadic culture that wanders, that seeks a greater fulfillment and that because they know of the character of being a nomadic community and having to move from place to place in a they are dependent on – if you will -- the kindness of strangers or the kindness of their neighbor and as the tradition says sometimes in treating the stranger you are treating angels unaware. This is part of the self-understanding – that we are there to be there for one another. And I suggest that we too have this sense of a nomadic self-understanding. We may not think of ourselves as nomads, but I think that our tradition is on to something that perhaps in spirit we really are nomads; we are people on a journey; we are people who are seeking a better land, more opportunities to fulfill our hopes and dreams and I think on this very Fourth of July, this is a week end when we celebrate our leaving a culture of tyranny, leaving the British Empire in order to traverse our own wilderness journey, it was across the oceans, to come to a new land, to begin to embody and live out the ideals that we feel are necessary, present and due everyone. And in our Declaration of Independence “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal, that they are endowed by their by their creator with certain unalienable rights and among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and that to secure these rights, to provide new garnets for the future security of generations to come that we even as a people felt the need to leave one place to become independent from one place in order to come to a new land to embody our ideals more fully. The Declaration of Independence says that we had to leave those who were deaf to the voice of justice and consanguinity and “consanguinity” means “of being with the same”. It suggests a kind of kinship. We needed to leave those who were deaf to the voice of justice and blind to consanguinity in order for us to come into a land where we could try to embody our ideals more fully. In a sense that's part of our nomadic heritage and our nomadic consciousness. We are people who strive for a better day, for new opportunities in a new land; we believe in the possibility of what Paul calls “a new creation”. So -- I suggest that this passage in Luke addresses a

community that knows that they are nomadic. You might remember from last Sunday's text which immediately precedes this story that Jesus was claimed to say "foxes have holes and birds nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head". Well, "Son of Man" can refer to Jesus, but it's more commonly understood as another phrase for "human being" – so foxes' holes, birds' nests – but the "human being" – we really have nowhere to lay our head. We are a nomadic people – we are prone to wander – we are people on a journey and because of that awareness of the nature of who we are, our hospitality – one to another is essential. As nomads we need to take seriously the practice of hospitality, of how we treat our neighbor and those who come our way and share this land or share this earth, that we need to treat them with a kind of generosity and respect as though our lives depended on it. In the ancient cultures it did and I suggest that's not so different today. The way we treat one another, the way we treat our neighbor, our very lives, all of our lives depend on how we love our neighbor and that we should love our neighbor as our self. On this depends everything says the great commandment. O.K. – so I suggest that what is at stake in this text is hospitality and that those of us who go out into the world that at this stage in Luke's story it's not so much about going out and talking about beliefs about Jesus or what it means to be a disciple, that actually will come later in Luke, but as we go out into the world, we are to go out as "people of hospitality", and that is how people know that the Kingdom of God is near, because hospitality, graciousness, just sharing is present. This passage says but you know, not everyone is going to practice hospitality -- not everyone will practice hospitality; we as people of God we know that what it means to be people of God is that we practice hospitality as though our lives depend on it, but not everyone thinks that way or acts that way. So if you come into a town and they do not share with you hospitality, because if indeed they did, you can say to them, this is the Kingdom of God, but if they don't share hospitality with you shake the dust off your feet, move on. So maybe there's nothing you can do about that – move on. I suggest that that is the intent behind this text and that whoever listens to you will listen to me and whoever rejects you, rejects the one who sent me. God's vision for us is that all will be treated with grand and great and precise hospitality. There'll be a fig tree for everyone; a vine for everyone; swords will be turned into plowshares, there will be enough and we as the people of God – that is our work in the world, so when you go out, go out in the spirit of hospitality. Now another reason that I suggest that this text is really about hospitality is because of a verse in this text that you didn't hear this morning. You

might notice in your bulletin that it says Luke 1-11 and then 16-20. Let me read for you what verse 12 is – it's the one that follows "Yet know this the Kingdom of God has come" – the text that's omitted and actually I don't know why -- but the text that is omitted says "I tell you on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town and then it goes on to list other towns – Chorozin, Bethsaida, who did not exhibit hospitality. I tell you that on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than that town. Well, the great sin of Sodom was lack of hospitality. That was the violence that Sodom did against God; they lacked hospitality. And Sodom is referred to in this text as a warning – do not be like Sodom, because those who don't practice hospitality will suffer the consequences of their own narrow thinking, isolation, avarice – whatever. Now, I want to read to you a couple of statements about Sodom – the City of Sodom. And one is from Josephus, late first century historian: "the Sodomites over winningly proud of their numbers and the extent of their wealth showed themselves insolent to men and women, and impious to the divinity insomuch that they no more remembered the benefits that they had received from God, hated foreigners and declined all intercourse with others. Indignant at this conduct, God accordingly resolved to chastise them for their arrogance." Now I don't want us to get into the mind-set that God is a punishing God – you know that God is going to chastise – but what I do suggest is that the consequences of lack of hospitality have the seeds of the downfall of that very city, country – whatever -- that is practicing inhospitality. So how about this one – this is from a fourth century document – "The men of Sodom waxed haughtily only on account of the good which the Holy One – blessed be he – had lavished upon them. They said "since there cometh forth bread out of our earth – well we know that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof – and it hath the dust of gold, why should we suffer wayfarers to come to us only to deplete our wealth? Come let us abolish the practice of traveling in our land. So Sodom said – you can't even come through this land even it's a more direct route to where you're going. We're not going to provide any hospitality for you. We're not going to provide you bread or food or water or whatever, because this is our wealth and we don't actually want to squander it on a wayfarer." The sin of Sodom was lack of hospitality and from the prophet Ezekiel: "This was the guilt of your sister Sodom and her daughters – other cities that practiced the same kind of avarice – the sin of Sodom, the guilt of your sister Sodom is that she had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy". Love your neighbor as yourself as if your lives depend on it. And I suggest that in this 21<sup>st</sup> century our lives do depend on how we love our

neighbor and how we treat one another and that it might behoove us to recognize that we really are all nomads, pilgrims on this planet earth and that we are dependent on one another for our whole well-being. We are interdependent and our own declaration independent was to be free from to be free for. And part of the call of the Kingdom of God is we need to be free from injustice and oppression and avarice so we can be free for one another so that every human being that we are all created equal and endowed by our creator with certain unalienable rights that we can be part of that dominion and we call that "The Kingdom of God". On this July fourth weekend I suggest that we reflect on the Gospel of Luke and our task as people of God to practice hospitality – first and foremost. People of God practice hospitality; that is our solidarity, one with another. People of God practice hospitality by loving our neighbor. And our neighbor is all of humankind and I would suggest our neighbor even includes creatures and creation itself because truly we are united one to another. We are dependent on the actions of one another for the wealth fare of the whole. I requested – and I talked to Tamara Still our music director here – that for our closing hymn today that we sing a hymn called "This is My Song". I gonna read you the two verses in just a moment. It's written to the tune of a tone poem written by Sibelius and these words were written between the two World Wars and it expresses a hope for lasting peace among all nations and races and cultures. It was written between the two World Wars and I would like to use the words from this hymn as my close that we as people of God be moved to practice a radical hospitality that can even be part of building peace for our day.

"This is My Song" is the title of the hymn and may this be our song.

"This is my song, O God of all the nations. A song of peace. For lands afar and mine. This is my home, the country where my heart is. Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine. But other hearts in other lands are beating with hopes and dreams as true and high as mine. My country skies are bluer than the ocean and sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine. But other lands have sunlight too and clover and skies are everywhere as blue as mine. Oh hear my song O God of all the nations, a song of peace for their land and for mine. May it be so."

