

7th Sunday after Pentecost
July 3, 2016
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Larson

Isaiah 66:10-14, Psalm 66:1-9, Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

[click here to read scripture texts for the day](#)

DISORIENTED GUESTS

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

When Jesus sent out seventy people to do his work in the world, he told them to be dependent on the kindness of others. He told them to show up as rather ill-prepared guests - guests who arrived without any bags and possibly really dirty feet because they weren't even supposed to wear sandals? I can't imagine anything more uncomfortable. I prefer to be really prepared for travel.

When I got the chance to travel to Norway for the wedding of some seminary friends, I prepared for months. I was going to do all the wedding festivities, visit distant family members and do a lot of hiking in the mountains. So I made all my lists and packed both dressier clothes and outdoor gear. Then four days before my flight, I slipped while bowling with friends and broke my wrist. I had to travel with a cast and I didn't even have a good story to tell. If I'd been injured rock climbing or something cool that'd be one thing, but all I could say was, "injured while bowling." I had to repack my backpack to make sure I could lift and maneuver it with one arm on the planes, trains and boats that would be part of the trip. A lot of the clothes and gear had to be left out. I decided I'd just have to do laundry a lot. Then on the plane ride over to Norway, my backpack was loaded below some stranger's suitcase that had a bottle of wine in it. That bottle broke in flight and wine got all over my few remaining clothing items.

All my best laid plans seemed so remote when I showed up at the home of a distant cousin in Oslo with a cast on my arm, reeking of wine, needing to do laundry immediately. It was so uncomfortable to be such a disoriented guest. Even when we don't show up smelling like wine, it can be hard to be a guest. Picture what it was, or is, like to go to with your parents to someone's house for dinner as a kid. None of your toys are there; you can't escape to your bedroom; there is strange, potentially gross food and not only do you have to eat it, you have to pretend to like it and say thank you. It's what your parents say you have to do and even Jesus says in this Gospel reading, "eat whatever is set before you."

The month I was in Norway was during the shrimp harvest. I love shrimp but there was a stretch there, when I was seeing different friends and family at each meal, during which I was served fresh shrimp and warm bread at each lunch and supper for five days in a row. That's a lot of shrimp and bread, especially when you're trying to peel shrimp and butter bread with one hand. It's hard to be a guest. It's hard to be dependent on the kindness of others. Yet that's what Jesus asked of the seventy people he sent out to do his work in the world. He sent them to be totally dependent on others, to be served by others.

Why would Jesus tell them to go be welcomed and served by others? Aren't Jesus' followers supposed to be the ones who welcome and serve? There's so much in scripture that encourages us to be welcoming - to welcome strangers, outcasts, children. A crucial task for each of us and for this congregation is to welcome - to let people know "there is a place for you here" and most importantly, there is a place for you in the heart of

God. There is a place for you in God's life. We all need to experience and share that welcome and the peace that comes from it.

But sometimes in order to really be able to experience and share God's welcome, we need to be guests ourselves. That's because when we're acting as hosts and helpers we are in control. We get to pat ourselves on the back for how good and kind we are. As hosts, we also get to determine how much of the "house" the guests get to experience. We get to decide if they're invited into the whole house or just the carefully prepared spaces for guests. We get to keep some doors closed, some areas off limits. Yet Jesus calls us to a hospitality that doesn't keep others in safe and polite spaces, but allows others to shape and influence us - to rearrange the "furniture" of our lives, of our congregations.

We need this kind of rearranging to keep us from thinking that it is all about us and all up to us. When we think it's all about us, we need people to disorient us a bit so that we can be reoriented towards God and others. When our lives are disrupted by others, we have the opportunity to discover that our hope and our home is in God, not in our own efforts. But most of us won't let guests disrupt us much when we're in the host role. So God sends us into places where we are guests, where we are outside our comfort zones, where we have to adapt and be changed, where we have to rely upon God.

It's hard to be a disoriented guest, but sometimes it's just what we need in order to experience and share the good news that we all have a place in God's heart. When do you find yourself a disoriented guest: At the hospital with a health condition; at another congregation, or here, during worship or coffee hour; while visiting a loved one in a long term care facility; while traveling; while in the home of in-laws; while engaging with someone from another cultural background?

Pay attention to the times that you are in the role of guest and seek out those times. Those of us who participated in the My Neighbor is Muslim series really need to go to the Islamic Center in Rochester or Waterloo to be guests of our Muslim neighbors now that we've done the study. As a very white congregation, we need to go and be guests at African American congregations and seek out ways to be in partnership. We need to be disrupted, rearranged and opened to the hospitality of God at work in and for us. This will be uncomfortable, but we can also remember the images from the Isaiah reading we heard this morning. Even as we have a God who knows we need disruptions, we also have a God who comforts us as a mother comforts her child.

The disruptions in our lives can turn us to the God who provides a nurturing home for us and all people, the God who holds out loving arms of welcome for all.

Let's take a moment to rest in that welcome.

Amen.

The hymn of the day is a change since the bulletin was printed. We'll sing hymn #722 from the red book, *O Christ Your Heart Compassionate*.