

Sermon: Love the Stranger  
4 Pentecost, Year C  
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

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“Who do you love?” That was the title of one of Bo Diddley’s songs with the repeated refrain, “Who do you love?” (sung) For the singer, he was asking “Who do you love, him or me?” It was about romance, of course. But this a.m. I ask you a more general question, “Who do *you* love?” (your family, your friends, etc.)

Now think of those that you don’t love. Please don’t name names! (those with whom you disagree, criminals, terrorists, certain politicians, etc.)

Do you know that one of the major points of the Gospels is to transform those lists, so your list of those you love gets longer and longer and the list of those you don’t love gets shorter and shorter? If you stayed at home not talking or listening to anyone, not encountering anyone, it actually could be pretty easy to love everyone - in theory. You’ve heard the phrase, no doubt, “I love humanity; it’s people I can’t stand.” Loving real flesh and blood people in our everyday life can be awfully challenging sometimes.

Surely Jesus loved his mom and the rest of his family, and Scripture tells us he loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus, who were his friends. But notice how he doesn’t limit his encounters to those in his little social circles. In Luke’s gospel reading for today, Jesus, God in flesh and blood, is heading toward Jerusalem. He has been encountering people all along the way, noticing everyone on his path, the rich and powerful but also the sick, the lost, the helpless, the poor, the powerless. And now his mission is fanning out. First he had called twelve disciples to follow him, to learn from him and to do the things he was doing. Now he has extended the reach of his teaching as he expands the discipleship to seventy. Jesus sends them on ahead of him to share the good news that the Kingdom of God is near them.

And he puts them in a very defenseless position. “Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals.” That would be like saying, “carry no wallet, no keys, no cell phone!” Can I have a show of hands of those of you who did **not** bring your wallet, keys or cell phone to church or at least leave it in your car? (not many of us!) Think about it. For most of us to even walk across town *without* these things would leave us a bit off kilter. No wallet? That would mean no way to carry or accumulate money, leaving you financially strapped. No extra suitcase? That would mean not having all the stuff you think you might need. No extra sandals? That would mean possibly becoming physically vulnerable as you stepped on thorns or chewing gum.

Jesus calls on these followers of his to be **DEPENDENT** on others, and not just others that they know, like friends or family members. Jesus is calling them to be dependent on the hospitality of strangers. He would have been familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures that exhort, “You shall (also) *love* the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Deut. 10:19. So by putting his disciples in the position of being dependent upon and accepting the hospitality of strangers, they will better know how to give hospitality to strangers in the future.

He tells them to stay put! Eat and drink what is put in front of you. That one is easy enough if your mama’s taught you right. But “cure the sick” is a bit more challenging! And Jesus knows

this whole enterprise will bring some difficulties. “I am sending you out like lambs in the midst of wolves.” He isn’t sugarcoating anything. He knows following him will be difficult at times.

We can stay home and not encounter the stranger, but Jesus is calling us to go out of our homes, out of our comfort zones, to share the good news of God’s kingdom. To share that God’s love and acceptance is for everyone. Indeed the number 70 that is used to describe the next group of disciples, signifies in Scripture that this good news is universal, for all people. Being dependent on others doesn’t always feel so good, and it makes us more aware of our own limitations. But in our need we recognize we are part of something greater than ourselves. We have been taught it is more blessed to give than to receive but there is tremendous opportunity to know the heart of God when we learn to receive the hospitality of others.

Recently I heard an account of a story that occurred on 9/11 eighteen years ago, when all of the incoming airplanes were rerouted to various airports after the terrorist attacks on America. One airport in Gander, Newfoundland, suddenly received 38 jumbo jets and 4 military planes. In a time of great turmoil and confusion because it took a while for the news of what was happening to get through, a town of just under 10,000 people showed incredible hospitality to 6,759 passengers, 9 cats, 11 dogs and two endangered apes. The Canadians hosted American refugees for roughly 5 days, taking them into their homes, giving them three hot meals each day, providing diapers, baby formula and filled prescriptions and new clothes. When they were asked in the end, “how can we pay you?” the response was “nothing. You’d do the same for us.” This is love for the stranger.

Think back to a time when have you been a stranger? Maybe some of you feel today that you are a stranger here at Emmanuel. If so, I sure hope you know we want you here and welcome you just as you are. Maybe you remember being the newest immigrant on your street, whether you are from Georgia or Guatemala. Maybe you remember being the new student at school. For many of us being the stranger is not a comfortable position to be in. The memory of it can still produce knots in our stomach! And love for a stranger can be counterintuitive. It’s easy to go sit with the people we know at school or at coffee hour. It’s easy to talk politics with the person we think will agree with us. It’s easy to hang out with the person with the same skin color, or with the same sexual orientation or who speaks the same language as we do. But God calls us to move out of that comfort zone, calls us to the practice of encountering those who are different from us with the eyes of love.

The stranger, the one who seems different than us, has something to teach us about God. We are all made in God’s image. By loving the stranger, we have an opportunity to deepen our relationship with God by learning something new about the creator, even as we marvel at our common humanity. Jesus calls us to travel light so we have the freedom to be present to those around us and to prepare others to live in the presence of Christ.

Is it risky? Yes. Absolutely. Sometimes it will mean being like a lamb in the midst of wolves! Not all people will accept the peace, the friendship, the love we offer. But we love the stranger anyway, because God does.

So again I ask you, “Who do you love?” This week I ask you to ponder the question. Seek out the stranger, the one who has something to teach you. Maybe before you even leave church today. May God grow the list of those whom you love as you reach out your hands to others. Amen.