

## **Courtyard Hospitality**

*July 16, 2006*

(Pentecost 6 - Year B)

Mark 6: 7-13

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

Last week, late in the afternoon, I suddenly remembered that I had forgotten a stole that I needed, over here in the church.

So, I walked from the door of the church offices, across the courtyard out there, toward the side door of the church.

It was one of the afternoons last week when it was 100 degrees outside.

I was walking quickly through the courtyard, with my mind somewhere else when, suddenly, I heard a voice from over my shoulder say: "Hello? Sir?"

I gotta say that I was very startled to hear that someone was right behind me, because I had thought that I was the only person around here.

So, I turned around and said:

"Yes? May I help you?"

Now, this man that I was now speaking to looked to be about my age. He did not have a shirt on, but had on khaki cargo shorts and a bandana tied around his head.

He was dripping wet, with sweat pouring off his forehead and body.

I am ashamed to admit that I then waited for this man to ask for a monetary hand-out or a contribution.

But, as I looked at this man, he said to me:

"Sir, I just wanted to thank you for this beautiful church courtyard.

I am homeless, and I have been walking from near the Target on Bosque to over here.

I just want you to know that this courtyard here is like a sanctuary for me.

I come here sometimes and drink the water out of your faucet over there, and I come here and rest and sit on these benches.

But, I tell you, sir, I never cause any harm.  
I am always very respectful.”

I didn't know quite what to say to this man in response.  
This man had thanked me, so I remembered the manners that my mother  
taught me, so I said in response:  
“You're welcome.”

Then, I said something to this man about how I, also, thought that the  
courtyard was beautiful and restful.  
I told him that he was welcome here any time.  
I then turned and went into the church to do whatever it was that I  
thought was so important.

When I left the church and drove off, this man was still sitting on a  
bench in the St. Alban's courtyard, in the shade.  
Silently, I prayed a prayer for this man.  
But, I prayed a prayer for myself as well.

I prayed, hoping that I had listened to this man and not treated him as a  
charity case, but had treated him as a human being.  
I prayed, hoping that he *did* find St. Alban's to be a place of sanctuary  
and hospitality.  
But, I mainly prayed that he would not leave here and shake the dust off  
his feet as a testimony against me and or against this parish.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus calls the twelve disciples and sends them  
out two by two.  
He orders the disciples to take nothing for the journey except a staff;  
No bread, no bag, no money in their belts.  
The disciples are to find hospitality and sanctuary in the houses of other  
people.  
And, if they don't, then the disciples are to shake off the dust on their  
feet as a testimony against them.

Many people will hear this story from the Gospel of Mark.  
And, they will hear that we are to imitate the disciples.

They will hear that the disciples of Jesus in 2006 are to do the same:  
To take nothing for the journey, to go hungry, to have no money, to not  
have any extra clothing.

I do believe that Jesus wants us to simplify our lives, clean out our  
closets, and reject the materialism that is so rampant in our culture.  
Yet, I don't know about you, but I have never really gone to such  
extreme measures to follow Jesus.

Sure, we have had garage sales to get rid of our excess stuff.  
I have lived within a budget.  
I have tried to get rid of some of my emotional and spiritual baggage.

But, I have not found myself to be on the journey, with no food, with no  
adequate clothing and with no money in my pockets.

More often than not, in the story from the Gospel of Mark,  
I don't see myself as one of the twelve disciples sent out two by two.

More often than not, in the story from the Gospel of Mark,  
I find myself in a place where one of those twelve disciples is knocking  
on *my* door, looking for a place to stay and rest,  
A place where I will listen,  
A place of sanctuary and hospitality.

And, I find myself hoping and praying that I will not offend these  
strange guests,  
That I will not offend them so badly by my self-preoccupied ways that  
they will shake the dust off of their feet as a protest against me.

When I was in the search process to be your Rector, one of the things  
that attracted me to St. Alban's is the mission statement that is  
written on the cover of the worship leaflet.

The Vision of our Diocese of Texas is written there, then below it it  
says:

“And here at St. Alban's, we carry out the Vision as a family of God  
welcoming everyone home.”

Many people come into these doors on Sunday mornings because we all, me included, are looking for sanctuary and rest.

And, we come into our courtyard, into the St. Alban's Memorial School, into the choir, into the youth group,

And, we come here, testing the mission statement,

Putting our toe into the water to see:

“Is St. Alban's *really* a family of God welcoming everyone home?”

If the answer is ‘yes,’ then we will see folks drinking living water from our faucet and taking a rest on the benches.

If the answer is ‘no,’ then we will see them dust off their feet as a testimony against us.

But, Jesus, I believe, is not just concerned about the Church.

Jesus is not just concerned about whether or not we are welcoming or unwelcoming when his disciples come and knock on our church door.

Jesus is concerned about each of us.

What will we do, personally, when Jesus knocks on the door of our heart?

What will we do, personally, when Jesus comes to us in the form of another person?

Jesus tells his disciples to enter a house and stay there.

Then, if any place will not receive and welcome the disciples, then they are to shake the dust off of their feet and move on.

And, in the first chapter of the Gospel of John, we hear the powerful words:

“Jesus was in the world and the world came into being through him; Yet the world did not know him.

He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

But to all who received Jesus, who believed in his name

He gave power to become children of God.”<sup>1</sup>

To all who receive Jesus,  
To all who practice hospitality,  
To all who welcome him into the courtyard of their heart,  
To them Jesus gives power to become children of God.

Jesus and his disciples come into our courtyard,  
Homeless, shirtless, and sweaty,  
Knocking on our door,  
Looking for a place to stay and rest,  
A place where we will listen,  
A place of sanctuary and hospitality.

Will Jesus and his friends shake the dust off their feet as a testimony  
against us?  
Or, will Jesus and his friends find a family of God, welcoming everyone  
home?

AMEN.

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<sup>1</sup> John 1: 10-12