

Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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What does a personal sense of mission look like in our modern world? Is it the sole realm of the evangelicals?

A healthy organization must know its mission, talk about it, review its mission from time-to-time, in order to flourish. A Mission Statement can take a long time for a community to develop, and some argue that a Mission Statement takes too much time and energy. By the time an organization has crafted it, circumstances in the world that we are called to serve may have changed – our mission may have changed also. The Vision Statement that St Andrew's developed long before I arrived here is both powerful and relevant:

Growing Spiritually
Building Community
Transforming Lives

That is pretty simple, but these words challenge us to stay focused. Anyone who knows me also knows that I love to multi-task. I can champion several things at once, but my challenge is to pay enough attention to one specific task to be effective in it.

We modern followers of Jesus need to focus on our mission that is grounded ultimately in radical love and welcome, just as those first century followers of Jesus needed to do. They needed their essential mission. In Matthew's Gospel the mission of the Jesus community was to proclaim good news everywhere that God's kin-dom, a new order, was coming soon. Everyone had their part in accomplishing that essential task. Some had the passion for adventure, living as nomads, travelling from town to town to heal the sick and preach.

I bet there were more than a few adventurers, journeyers among them whom I can relate to, who were full of great ideas, ways to expand God's vision.

One follower might muse: *Let's create a little sandal making business to generate money to build a home base.*

Imagine Jesus responding, gently, asking the earnest follower: "Great idea. Now, what is your talent?"

The adventurous follower might reply, "My gift is preaching from town to town about God's Love."

Jesus might respond, "Wonderful. Focus on that gift, trust God to provide the rest. Remember that God provides benefactors too, to feed our ministries. Trust in that."

Gifted benefactors are all around us and among us today, feeding ministries locally and globally. God provides – What gift or gifts does God provide in and through you? How is God using you right now?

Those nomads of Jesus' time, free spirited faithful people in our modern time moving as the Spirit directs them, trusting the good graces of those receiving them – to be bluntly honest, that type of mission is not for everyone. And benefactors, maybe they envy the

free-spirited charismatic adventurers. Paul, who came along after Jesus, reminds us indeed of the faith communities of the first century, that the Body of Christ needs many parts, each gift unique yet all of equal importance.¹

Keeping focused.

Growing Spiritually, Building Community... Transforming Lives.

When we connect with our God-planted talents, we move from memorizing the words of a Mission Statement to connecting deeply with a sense of personal, collective Mission.

Today, right now, we are invited to connect with the call of Jesus, to paraphrase him:

Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me.²

I imagine myself being symbiotically connected with Jesus. Just like a fetus connected within the womb – interconnected. Christ-presence in us as we are Christ-presence for all we meet. Do you feel that way? How does that, or ought that, sense of deep interconnection with Jesus impact our day-to-day living?

How are our interactions with people impacted if we truly believe that as people we meet encounter us, they are encountering Christ? It could be a powerful exercise this week for you and me, to be mindful of our welcoming encounters with difficult people. Maybe we would be even a little bit more patient? Loving?

If you are a long-timer in church like me, we can get routinized. We might be tempted to think we've seen it all. But look with fresh spiritual eyes this week.

Are you a newer to Christian faith? In this passage, you might be interested in what Jesus says in today's passage:

...whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward³

The Greek word for "little ones" can be used to refer to children, but scholars say that this particular reference to little ones is Jesus speaking of those who are new in their faith. How many among us were invited by someone in our life to try participating in worship, or church camp, or Bible study, for the first time? Or, maybe you were, or you could be the one *doing the inviting*, or listening and supporting, for someone who needs a spiritual community to surround them and care for them.

We in the United Church are not always eager to "invite" – we can be quietly uncomfortable with evangelical acts like inviting, or sharing publicly a story of how God changed you, or, otherwise boldly embodying Christ's love. Perhaps today is your day to accept an ancient-but-oh-so-modern invitation to connect with Christ-presence in you and your gifts, and to audaciously live each day this week and every week with a sense of Mission to embody Christ's unconditional love and welcome. Amen.

¹ <https://bible.oremus.org/?ql=460110544>

² Elisabeth Johnson, Commentary on Matthew 10: 40-42 workingpreacher.com

³ Matthew chapter 10, verse 42 (New Revised Standard Version)