

## ***A Modern Christian Etiquette***

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

July 3, 2022

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

“Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’”<sup>1</sup> This word of peace is the first word, the opening word, the announcing word. Do we notice, here, how Jesus does not direct his friends to do any sort of assessment before making this proclamation?<sup>2</sup>

When Census time comes around, I get to hear more than a few stories of how risky the work of entering households can be. People angry at how intrusive they feel our government can be, snarling dogs and intimidating Portuguese Pot-Bellied Pigs – who knows what you will encounter? This is risky stuff, going to a person's home, especially if you don't do a risk assessment first.

But therein is the challenge at the heart of Jesus. Trolls have always existed – people who needle, who are confrontational, who bully. Yet we, seekers of the Way that Jesus lays out for us, are to wish peace upon the unfamiliar places that we visit. I'll remind you that that spirit of declaring “Peace to this house” applies also to social media. I wonder: How would Jesus counsel us as we engage nasty people on Facebook or Twitter! Internet etiquette, or lack of it, has amplified political and religious tribalism like never before and made the sharing of disinformation, and misinformation, so much easier. A political theorist asked of graduates at a recent Harvard commencement:

Why is it exactly that things are so crazy, so complicated, so messy in this country right now? [Because] Facebook broke democracy. They didn't mean to, it was definitely an accident, but they definitely did.”<sup>3</sup>

It feels like the wild west for bad behaviour, the way people sometimes behave – online and in real life. But Luke's passage today reminds us that people bringing the message of peace to homes in ancient times were encountering nasty and spiteful people, too.

Here's the thing: We are not to follow the world's wild west, unfiltered, unfettered etiquette. To follow Jesus calls us to learn Christ-like etiquette: In the face of bullies and blowhards, we are to still proclaim, “Peace to your house.”

“If they don't accept that message,” Jesus says, and I paraphrase, “move on. The kingdom is near, you need to believe that.”

Do we believe that? With the nastiness that is out there?

A very special person in my life passed away this weekend. A person who was honest with me once, saying how difficult it was when her daughter came out to the family as gay. They really, really struggled with the theology of it. But she looked me in the eye, her voice low and sincere, said, “I love that daughter of mine more than anything.” She

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<sup>1</sup> Luke chapter 10 vs 5. New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE). Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

<sup>2</sup> Working Preacher July 7, 2019 Amy G. Oden. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/ordinary-14-3/commentary-on-luke-101-11-16-20-4>

<sup>3</sup> Dear Working Preacher, “Called Together by Kathryn M. Schifferdecker, Jun 26/22. workingpreacher.org

approached every aspect of life with that kind of clarity, even the unfamiliar paths that she had to follow. She went there with deep love and abiding faith that Jesus was right beside her.

How difficult it is to be the peace that we want for the world,<sup>4</sup> especially when it seems that in the way of that peace is that so-and-so? How do we speak peace to people whom we are certain will never listen? Perhaps this is the “Christian Etiquette” at the heart of our readings today that we need to transpose into something we can use as modern-day followers of Jesus. No risk-assessments, no preconceived ideas about the resistance we are going to receive.

I had to do telemarketing once for my university alumni association. I hated it, and I didn't do very well at it, probably because I projected my anxieties into my cold calls. I didn't believe in the cause, really. I needed the money.

The newly commissioned men and women around Jesus were reminded of the reason for this journey into risky, unfamiliar territory: The kin-dom is near, God's radical vision, a new way of understanding all human relationships. Do we believe that the kin-dom is near? It all starts there. Seeking Peace, but also resolving what we believe about our Creator and what role we play in the re-ordering of our world, forms the foundation of a modern Christian etiquette, rules of engagement in this risky world. How is your personal spiritual foundation of Peace, that will allow you to bring God's Peace to real and virtual encounters this week. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup>An interesting investigation into this quote, whether or not it can be attributed to Mohandas Gandhi. <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2017/10/23/be-change/>