

Jim Gill

January 27, 2019

“Welcome”

Nehemiah 8:1-3

Luke 4:14--30

I Corinthians 12:12-31

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

God is Great and Mighty! God is more precious than silver and gold! The law of the Lord is more to be desired than gold and it is sweeter than the honey from the honeycomb. God is here! Please take note of the announcements in your bulletin, both for folks for whom we are to remember in prayer and the update from your Mission Task Team. I guess I am to announce that after this morning's service you will have a reception for ME. I look forward to getting to know you. I appreciate those of you who have asked me to be their friend on Facebook so far.

INTRODUCTION TO INTERIM MINISTRY

Please allow me a moment to introduce myself beyond the written word included in your bulletin. First let me explain the staff I carried in with me this morning. The top of my staff is my Father's cane and the bottom is my Father-in-law's walking stick. When I began doing Interim Ministry I fashioned this staff as a reminder that I am a product of those who went before me. My father was a radio man in the Army Air Corp and was a machinist for Cameron Iron Works. Anne's father was a pilot who flew 50 missions and was a manufacturer's representative for gas grills.

For the months that I am here I will place this Shepherd's staff in the sanctuary and at different places around the church as a reminder to us all that I am a temporary shepherd who has been called here to prepare you for the next person that God is going to call to serve with you. This is my third time to serve as an interim pastor. The in vogue term now, rather than interim pastor is transitional pastor. You have been in transition since Hurricane Harvey and now are in transition as you do the necessary prayer and work to prepare for a new installed pastor. My first transitional pastoral call lasted 10 months. My second call lasted 2 years and then I was called to be the installed pastor at that church and stayed another 4 and a half years. I'm not going to do that again. I'm retired!

On Thursday when folks were trying to find a white robe that would fit me to participate in Bob's Topfor's funeral service we quickly realized that I am not the same size as your previous pastor. I felt the opposite of the shepherd boy David trying on King Saul's armor. ...I felt more like King Saul trying on David's tunic. I was in good company though, wearing my black robe serving next to the pastor from First Methodist in his black robe. My mother commissioned this robe for me when I was ordained 40 years ago and she had the foresight to have it made big enough for me to grow into and still fit into is 40 years later.

In participating in Bob's service I was struck by the similarity of liturgy that I have experienced so far. Much of the funeral liturgy is the same word for word. At Faith Presbyterian in Baytown we used the Ecumenical Apostle's Creed as you

do here. However, there are some differences. At Bob funeral I mentioned that Presbyterians say debts and debtors instead of trespasses and trespassers. (In Ecumenical settings we are used to waiting for you to catch up.) This morning I have asked Jim Stovall to lead the singing of the Kyrie until I get the hang of it. I'm counting on you to let me know if I'm doing something that is not kosher.

I know that we Christians and Jews have been called the "People of the Book" but I believe that Lutherans are "People of the Bulletin." Last night I saw a meme on Facebook that said "Most new pastors think they're gonna change the world then they almost get fired for changing the bulletin." Your bulletins are literary masterpieces. I am allergic to cats, but my hat's off to CATS your secretary. (I actually am allergic to cats and on Monday my first two home visits were to homes that had cats. At one of the homes the cat jumped in my lap 3 times)

Later Thursday night I attended the 6th Annual Ecumenical Prayer Service as a part of the week of Prayer for Christian Unity. At the supper before the service I got to sit with Bishop Michael Rinehart who I had met previously at a conference and had given him some of my CD's of original music. He remembered me. I said, "Well, Faith Lutheran doing its part for the Week of Christian Unity by having a Presbyterian and Methodist conduct a Lutheran Funeral. I told him about me not having a white robe and he said, "Just be yourself.". Wear what you want." He also said, "I do hope you will get to play your music for them."

Yesterday I attended the funeral for Pete Peterson's grandson at Hosanna Lutheran and during that service it occurred to me that this staff is also symbolic of our time together as a Presbyterian Pastor serving a Lutheran Congregation. This week two traditions have come together for a season of ministry, and based on my experience of the members of this congregation that I have met so far I believe it is going to be a rewarding experience for all of us. On my last Sunday with you I will carry this staff out with me symbolizing the ending of our relationship as transitional pastor and flock. And the people said? "AMEN!"

Now, let us begin our service as we confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another. Most Merciful God.....

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 4:14-21

I understand that last week you heard the lectionary gospel lesson of Jesus' first recorded miracle of changing the water into 120 gallons of wine for a wedding. I'm sure that miracle garnered a very positive reaction. This morning as I preach my first sermon with you we will take a look at the first sermon that Jesus delivered to his hometown crowd. Will you please stand as we hear the word of God from the gospel of Luke 4:14-21.

The Gospel of our Lord. Praise to you O Christ!

Let us pray. O God, inexhaustible source of all good things, we bless you for the gifts of your love. Grant that we may hear your word with a real desire to receive what it promises and to practice what it commands. Engrave it not only on our minds but in our hearts, and transform us by your Holy Spirit into the image of your Son, making us contemplate thy glory in the clear mirror of the gospel.
(Edited by Howard Rice and Lamar Williamson Jr.)

One day I was in Bed Bath and Beyond and I had wandered to the place where they sold welcome mats. There was one in particular that caught my eye. It said, in bold letters. "Go Away!" It inspired one of my songs that begins, "Her welcome mat said, "Go Away."

This last Friday I went to visit my friend John Jackshaw in Montgomery, Texas. John is a blind stand-up comic who also does radio production and voice over commercials. When I got to John's house his Welcome Mat was turned around. It said Welcome as you left the house. You weren't welcomed as you came; you were welcomed to leave! John couldn't tell the difference. So I turned it around.

I certainly feel like the Welcome Mat has been put out for me. It's great to begin serving among you. There will be a time though when the Welcome Mat is turned around and I will be welcome to leave...so you can welcome your next installed pastor.

Please help me to get to know you. How many of you are native Dickinsonites? Dickinsonians? How many of you are from some other home town? I'm a native Houstonian. My wife Anne is a native Detroitite and "naturalized Texan who got here by way of Chicago, New Orleans and Dallas. She went to SFA in Nacogdoches before coming to Austin where we first met. Since we moved to Houston in 1981 Anne has made Houston her "adopted hometown."

I used to love to listen to Prairie Home Companion on Saturday afternoons. Each week, Garrison Keillor did a monologue about his fictional home town Lake Wobegone in Minnesota. (I think Garrison is Lutheran) He would end each monologue with the line, "That's the news from Lake Wobegone, where all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are above average."

That is, of course, impossible. It's impossible for everyone to be above average. In a General Electric survey some years ago, the average person surveyed placed themselves in the 77th percentile. In fact, only 2 percent of the respondents placed themselves as below average.

Today, everyone on the soccer team gets a trophy for showing up and playing whether they win a game or not. They're called participation trophies... This

week I saw a Korean American comedian who made the case that the Confederate statues are basically “Participation Trophies”...because the South lost. They participated....

Abraham Lincoln wasn't always a winner. He was defeated seven times for elective office before winning the Presidency of the United States. He did not give up.

Vincent van Gogh earned all of \$85 from his paintings during his lifetime. One hundred years after his death, just one painting alone sold for the incredible sum of \$82.5 million.

Then there was this itinerant, Middle Eastern preacher who lived over 2,000 years ago whose ideas as we will see next week were definitely rejected by the people of his adopted hometown, as well as the religious leaders of his time and country.

The point is clear. If Abraham Lincoln, Vincent van Gogh, or Jesus of Nazareth had let rejection rule their lives, and let it keep them from doing and saying what they felt sure to be right, our world would be incredibly impoverished today.

We all know that Jesus was actually born in another town. He was a native Bethlehemite. He was somewhat of a refugee also because he spent his toddler years in Egypt. He was also a product of the suburbs because he spent his Elementary, Junior and Senior High School years in the Gentile Ghetto of Nazareth. Nazareth was his adopted hometown.

Nazareth was a town of about 20,000. It was there that Jesus grew up, played with friends, worshipped in the synagogue, and assisted his father around the carpenter shop. Two weekends ago I went on a Men's Retreat at Laity Lodge in Leakey, Texas. It's a retreat center founded by Howard E. Butt, from the HEB Grocery chain. The music leader at the conference was Buddy Greene, who wrote the music for the song “Mary Did You Know?” For him I wrote a song that I shared at the closing worship service. I wrote “Joseph Did You Know?” It was, after all, a Men's Conference. We need Equal time. Buddy said I would hear from his lawyers.

The gospel of Mark in chapter 6:3 records the names of Jesus' brothers as James, Joses, Judas and Simon. (I guess Joseph ran out of “J” names). We don't know the names of his sisters or how many there were, just that there had to have been more than one because they are described in the plural. How would you have liked to be one of the brothers of Jesus having to always hear people say, “Why can't you be like your brother Jesus?” How would you like to have been one of the sisters of Jesus? Throughout his ministry we read that Mary his mother and his brothers traveled with him but the sisters had to stay at home.

The passage Jesus read for his first adopted hometown sermon was taken from Isaiah 61:1-2. This was in essence his Inaugural Address. The passage from Isaiah was actually a much longer passage, but Jesus cut it short. In fact he didn't even finish verse 2. He left off the part about "the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all those who mourn." .

His exposition of the 1 and a half verses wasn't very long either. It was a 9 word sermon. "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Next week we will read more about the people's reaction to his sermon. Maybe we'd have bigger attendance next week if word got out that I only preached 9 word sermons. 😊

Jesus had been preaching in Capernaum and had been making wine in Cana but he came to his hometown to give his Inaugural Address. He came to fulfill the scripture he quoted in his first adopted hometown sermon. He came to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Now, that is our mission. Your Mission Task Team summarizes it this way, "Love God, Love our Neighbors, Make Disciples. That is what we are called to do until we are called way to be with him.

As the lesson from I Corinthians shared with us, it is going to take all of us working together. Everybody is somebody in the body of Christ. Each one has a part to play. There are no "non-essential" workers in the body of Christ.

Try stubbing your toe and you will realize the truth of what Paul wrote when he wrote if one member suffers all suffer together with it; Try attending two funerals in your first week on the job and realize that if one member is honored all rejoice together with them.

Some are apostles, some prophets, some teachers; some wonder workers, some healers, some assistants, some leaders, some communicators and some are ... transitional pastors. ...but all of us are to Love God, Love our Neighbors and Make Disciples of all nationalities.

In Jesus' Great Commission when he first charged his 11 friends to make disciples of all nations the word used there is "ethne." It's the word from which we get the word ethnic. It's hard for me to make a whole nation a disciple, but I can make disciples of individuals FROM all nationalities. We can do that by striving for the greater gifts...The greater gifts from the next chapter of I Corinthians that says that faith, hope and love abide these three, but the greatest of these is love. Why is love the greatest? Love is the greatest because when we arrive at the home Jesus has and is preparing for us we won't need faith

because we will see face to face...and we won't need hope because it will be realized...but we will always need love.

Jesus left his adopted hometown of Nazareth to return to his original home of heaven. He is now in THAT hometown of heaven preparing a place to welcome us. In that hometown everyone listens and rejoices when he speaks. In that hometown there are no prejudices, no separation. That hometown grew this week with the addition of Bob Topfor and Noah Gunhouse.

Woody Guthrie wrote a song that said, "This world is not my home, I'm just passing through, if heaven's not my home, then Lord what would I do? The angels beckon me from heaven's open door and I can't feel at home in this world anymore."

If home is where you spend the most time, this world isn't it. Compared to eternity, the 70-80-90 years we spend on this planet is just a scout camp out. No matter where you were born, Houston or Detroit, Harlingen or Dickinson there is a home for which we are born again.

Until then, our calling is to make our church into a place that "feels like" home for those who have been drawn here, Our calling is to introduce as many people as we can to the One who left his adopted hometown behind to prepare an even better place for all who would follow him and live forever.

Our calling is to make our church into a place where one of the Top 6 things for Visitors to Know is that ALL ARE WELCOME AT THE LORDS' TABLE. REALLY WE MEAN EVERYONE. WELCOME!
And the people said? AMEN

POST COMMUNION PRAYER:

Dear Lord, we thank you for the places we were born--for the homes through which we were brought into the world. For those homes that were nurturing and encouraging, we give you thanks. We thank you for homes that were not ideal, for homes that were dysfunctional and we pray for the ability to forgive.

We pray for those on our hearts who are in need. We pray for those who do not have a home to call home. We pray for those who are not home because they are in the hospital and for those who are at home and not able to be with us because they are home-bound.

We thank you for this church as a temporary hometown for us. We thank you for calling us out of our isolation into community in the midst of a community. We are all pilgrims on this earth just passing through, longing for our heavenly hometown that you have prepared for us where there will be no division, no profiling, no prejudice, no sorrow and no pain.