

## A Year of Living Intentionally-Radical Hospitality

Acts 10: 23b-35

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[Video "Invite": <http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/39587/Invite-4>]

Now that's "Radical Hospitality"! Sharing God's love and the potential of living by it...what we traditionally call "discipleship"....is supposed to be joyfully contagious. The experts (Schaller) suggest that 83% of new members to churches join because they were invited by friends or family. It helps to have great music and programs and preaching but in the end it is that invitation to those with whom we associate that grows a church.

At LAUMC for these last few years we have been blessed and challenged by the vision of United Methodist Bishop Robert Schnase's book The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations (Abingdon 2008). We have come to understand that his five practices so describe the heart of discipleship and the fulfillment of our membership vows as United Methodists, that we have actually organized our Church Council structure around them. We support five standing committees that resource those five practices of discipleship. Can you name the five practices? [Discipleship Medallion]

Bold Mission and Social Justice-We Share  
Passionate Worship-We Love  
Deepening Faith-We Grow  
Extravagant Generosity-We Give  
Radical Hospitality-We Share

We are convinced that anyone, anywhere on their spiritual journey...from new comer to old timer.....who commits to live out these five practices will be blessed as they grow in discipleship to Jesus Christ. By "discipleship to Jesus Christ" we are not talking about an intellectual conformity to doctrine

or some new standard of piety. We are talking about "Touching heaven and changing earth with head, heart and hands." We are convinced that where ever we are on our spiritual journey if we practice Bold Mission and Social Justice, Passionate Worship, Deepening Faith, Extravagant Generosity and Radical Hospitality we will grow and prosper as people and as a community.

What if we...individually and corporately.....were to dedicate the next year committed to these five practices of fruitful living...intentionally?

Throughout this month we will explore these discipleship practices. Last Sunday with the extraordinary "Changing Earth Together" weekend we experienced Bold Mission and Social Justice in an amazing way.

This morning I can't think of a more powerful way of exploring the meaning of Radical Hospitality than by sharing the Sacrament of Holy Communion; especially this first Sunday of October which for the Protestant churches of the world is "World Communion Sunday".

Consider our Bible lesson for this morning. At a time when Orthodox Jews such as Jesus and his twelve disciples were expected to have no association with Gentiles, the Apostle Peter following Jesus' resurrection is called by God to visit the home of a Roman Centurion by the name of Cornelius. Not only is Cornelius a Gentile but he is an officer in the Roman Occupation forces that are oppressing Israel. These are the people who when manipulated by the Hebrew Sanhedrin crucify Jesus as a subversive. God sends Peter to the home of Cornelius to accept his hospitality; that means to spend a few days under the same roof, to share meals together, to touch and be touched by people who would ritually defile an Orthodox Jew according to their traditions.

This Peter, our beloved fisherman who sinks while trying to walk on water, who denies Jesus when The Lord needed him the most, who runs away from the cross...this Peter learns in this encounter with Cornelius that "God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who is in awe of God and does what is right is acceptable to God". In the original language the word "nation" comes from the root for our English word "ethnic" [ethnos]; it is not so much about national borders but about people, every race, every religion, every class is acceptable to God.

The Apostle Paul, Peter's colleague and theological competitor will write to the church in Galatia, "There is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female, slave nor free, but we are all one in Christ Jesus our Lord...." (Galatians 3:28).

In a time when race and religion, gender and social status divided societies, the church practiced radical hospitality...all were included and all meant all.

[Preacher moves to the Communion Table] This is at the heart of the United Methodist doctrine of "open communion"; how we offer the sacraments to anyone and all present regardless of membership, age or status. While many denominations will restrict access to the sacraments to members only, or only to those members in good standing by creed, canon law or moral behavior, in the United Methodist church we don't believe that human rules and regulations can restrict anyone to the symbols of God's love which is given for all.

In the Church of England during the 18th century, at a time when the sacraments were only offered to church members and to be a member one had to own property, John and Charles Wesley, founders of the Methodist movement and ordained clergy in the Church of England offered communion to prisoners in jail, workers in the fields and factories, slave or free. This got them into a lot of trouble! But for us all are welcome to the table of The Lord.

We don't adhere to the doctrine of transubstantiation as our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters do; believing that the consecrated bread and wine actually, literally become the body and blood of Jesus. The Wesley's rejected the "adoration of the host", such as bowing to the altar when the elements are present as one enters and leaves the sanctuary, or parading the elements in and around the church. We understand the elements of Holy Communion to be symbolic of Christ's body and blood not mystically transformed into the real thing. As a result following the consecration of the bread and the wine by ordained Elders, the elements can be distributed by anyone...men, women, young, old. Last weekend our Friendly Visitor team

spread out and shared communion with all sorts of people in all sorts of places just as the Wesley's did almost 300 years ago.

As a part of the Temperance Movement in the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries it is our tradition not to serve wine in Holy Communion but grape juice; we do not want to exclude anyone who struggles with alcohol or who might be in recovery from the sacrament. Its the same reason we now offer gluten free breads and juice so that anyone with allergies will be included.

As contemporary as all this may sound our "Eucharist" ("thanksgiving", "grateful" or "gratitude") liturgy contains elements that go back centuries:

*Introductory prayer*-A dialogue between the officiant and the people, we are all in this together, reminding us why we are here at this moment and who we are as a people; "The Lord be with you...And also with you...Lift up your hearts....We lift them up to The Lord..."

*The Sanctus*-A reminder of the hymn sung in heaven day and night around the throne of God as envisioned by John of Patmos in the Book of Revelation where at the End of Time all the faithful will join in singing; "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and mind, heaven and earth are full of your glory...hosanna in the highest..." (Revelations 4:8-11)

*The Words of Consecration*-When the ordained breaks the bread and lifts up the cup she recites words first said by Jesus at the Last Supper the night before he died two thousand years ago (Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-20) and reiterated by the Apostle Paul (I Corinthians 11:23-25). They remind us of that unbroken chain of faithful people who gather around the Table of The Lord to celebrate God's love and seek God's healing and inspiration to live as disciples; "This bread is my body broken for you....this cup is my blood shed for you...."

*Confession of faith*-Before we share in the meal we, in the simplest and most profound words, join together to say what believe and have since the

very beginning of the church; "Christ has died. Christ has Risen. Christ will come again."

These basic elements of the Eucharist are found in almost all Christian communities. We share these traditions together even when we disagree on other details. By tradition we United Methodist share the element by intinction (dipping bread into the cup) rather by the common cup (eating the bread and individually drinking from one cup). But in spite our differences we are all one in the body of Christ as we repeat this ancient rite of Holy Communion.

While working for the Methodist Church in Kenya 37 years ago Bonnie and I shared World Communion Sunday with thirty or so African brothers and sisters crammed in a thatched roof school house with blackboards and wooden benches on the dirt floor. We have served Holy Communion to muscled bound, tattooed male prisoners in the Medium Security Prison in Carson City, Nevada who broke down in tears discovering that even they were worthy of receiving the symbols of God's love for them in Christ. We have given Communion to those about to die at home or in a hospital; to those all dressed up in their Sunday best worried that they might get germs from the juice. We have shared Holy Communion with teenagers at the beach when all we had was chocolate chip cookies and milk.

Many churches will insist that one must "understand" what they are doing to make Holy Communion effective, so they restrict it by age or conformity to creed or canon law. But who, however well educated or experienced, can ever fully comprehend, define or intellectually limit the love God has for creation? It is not what we do that makes the sacrament work but what God has done for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's why it is offered to anyone. That is why our hospitality, if it is in the spirit of Christian discipleship, must be radical. This God we worship, this father of Jesus, knows no partiality. Neither should we. For God knows all-too-well that there is not one person here, especially me, who deserves this

gift, but we stand to receive it because this God of love wants us to have it anyway that we might be free.

Come let us share the Lord's meal together.....Amen.