

Year A, June 18, 2017
2 Pentecost (Proper 6)
Christ Church, Mexia

Last Sunday while doing a poor job of trying to explain the Trinity, I told you about an icon created by Andrew Rublev over 500 hundred years ago in Russia. It was based on the Old Testament text that we heard today. It said that the Lord appeared to Abraham – he looked up and saw three men standing near him. But it isn't my intention to re-visit the Trinity again today. Rather, I'd like to highlight the unusual, at least to us, hospitality that Abraham showed to the three strangers – gracious welcome, water to wash their feet, a place to rest and food. And in those days strangers were most often very different from you; you didn't have to travel far to be among people of a different "tribe" or culture. Radical hospitality is still very much a concept among modern Arabs today. Everyone is to receive the very best hospitality, including the expectation that if a guest expresses admiration for something you own, compliments it, then you have to give it to them.

Of course, extreme hospitality was or is not limited to people of the Middle East in the past or present. "Corrie Ten Boom's family in Holland was torn apart by the Nazis in World War II, with most of her immediate relatives perishing in concentration camps due to the harboring of Jews in their home. It was a sacrifice they were willing to make, for God had given them a heart for hospitality. In her book *In My Father's House*, Corrie writes about her family's penchant for taking in guests as she remembered her childhood: 'Many lonesome people found a place with us, where there was music, humor, interesting conversations, and always room for one more at the oval dinner table. Oh, it's true, the soup may have been a bit watery when too many unexpected guests came, but it didn't matter.

Mother loved guests. Her lovely blue eyes would brighten, and she would pat her dark hair into place when she knew we would be squeezing another visitor around the table – already bursting with four children, three aunts, herself and Papa. With a flourish, she would place a little box on the table, and spreading her arms wide she would say to our visitor, "You are welcome in our house, and because we are grateful for your coming, we will add a penny to the blessing box..." Can you imagine what it must have felt like to be their guest? And not every guest was like them, especially when they begin to welcome and hide Jewish people.

Usually we fear the Other (those who are not like us), and so it is very difficult to be hospitable to them. But we are reminded by Will Willimon, in his book *Fear of the Other*, "Nothing is (or at least should be) more countercultural than our belief, engendered in us by Jesus, that our identity is secure in God – not in our nationality, race, gender or any other ways the world demarcates human beings." He is not alone. For example, Miroslav Volf "urges the church to cultivate a 'hermeneutic of hospitality' in our relationship with Muslims. In contrast to the popular 'hermeneutic of suspicion,' where we expect something sinister beneath the surface of the Other..." Yes, loving our neighbor is difficult; it is even difficult to see or admit the certain "others" are in fact our neighbors.

This past week we saw incivility and hostility play out on a baseball diamond in Alexandria, VA. As I have said earlier, this has been a particularly polarizing time in our political life and the gulf between us has become cataclysmic. Fortunately, it seems, at least for a moment, this unfortunate, violent act by a desperate and troubled man has gained the attention of our leaders and helped them see how they have been behaving toward one another, and thus modeling that behavior for us. And I pray that it will be a lesson that is not quickly lost in the day-to-day activities of their jobs as they move forward. Clearly, they should set a better example, for disagreement in a civil and respectful way, and they should focus on governing in a way that is good for all of the various groups who make up our wonderful and diverse country, not just the few who have money and power. They, and we, have to find a way to be more inclusive – a way to include the "others" however we define them.

And we all define them; we all have them. Think for a moment about the story of the Good Samaritan. Three people come by the injured man, a minister, a committed lay-person, but the only one who stopped and rendered aid was a _____. Fill in the blank with your enemy – the Samaritans were considered enemies of the Jews, but that is who stopped in Jesus' story. So, is it Muslims, members of ISIS, people of color, Republicans or Democrats, conservatives or liberals, rich people or poor people? Fill in the blank as many times as you can, and then you will have named your "others." And that is a beginning. Only when we name a problem, can we begin to resolve it.

Recall also that Jesus told this parable to the lawyer after he was charged for welcoming and eating with sinners. Yes, Christ hung out with and ate with the "others." So, must we! And then maybe the

prayer we said at the beginning of our service today, our collect for the day, can be answered – through God’s grace we may proclaim God’s truth and administer God’s justice, God’s justice, not ours, with compassion.

In the name of the one God - the Creator, The Word, and the Spirit.
Amen.