

The summertime journey with the Gospel continues almost with the sense that the stories told are new for us in the very days we live. The stories we are hearing and the persons we are meeting both invite and challenge us to “put our hand to the plow” and move forward, never backwards, toward the Gospel vision of life, neighbor, service and love.

Just last week, remember, we met those who passed by the wounded person on the road.

It was the **stranger**, remember—the foreigner, the one to fear and disdain, the one who came from a people named as “different,” who offered hospitality, healing and care to the man left wounded. A puzzling and controversial image when applied to the times in which we live and a challenge to the many presumptions of our day. A timely lesson as we make our way through our church and world...in times like these. Words, memories and the stories that shape our faith, which can, for some, be quite discomfiting as Jesus himself challenges and contradicts the accepted “wisdom” and opinions of our day.

Today, we meet Abraham and Sarah, who welcomed three travelers to their home, people on the way, from another land; they ran to greet them, welcomed

them—these unknown ones—with enthusiasm and joy—not with fear! They opened their land, their home and their minds and entered into conversation with the strangers. Their extraordinary hospitality brought healing and life, establishing a whole new generation rooted in an open spirit, a welcoming heart and table fellowship. Another story and a lesson for the days and times in which we live.

And now we meet Martha and Mary, and again a whole new perception is revealed. In Jesus day, Martha was right to be perturbed. She was not upset that she was left with the work: Martha was upset because Mary was daringly doing what no woman was allowed to do in those days: conversing with a “teacher,” studying the Word of God and proclaiming its truth.

Mary’s sense of hospitality was to break through the prejudices of her culture and religion and enter into conversation with an openness and a willingness to let the story and life of Jesus shape and form her own attitudes about the circumstances and events of her village, country and world.

Mary disturbed many people as she upset the whole culture...the whole accepted way of doing things...the whole

role of women: in her “doing” she elicited anger and criticism. And Jesus response in the midst of the criticism, shock and anger directed toward him: “She has chosen the better part”—this new way—this new equality, this radical departure, this new hospitality —*and it will not be taken from her*, for remember, as we have learned, that all are ONE in Christ: neighbors are to be loved!

Jesus, without hesitation, challenged the social and political expectations of his day and left many uncomfortable with his vision, his words and his faith. The Good News he preached caused many to walk away.

Both the world in which we live and the Church we love have yet to grasp the power and meaning of these encounters on the journey, these simple life changing stories of a welcoming hospitality. For some these stories and ways should have no bearing on the realities we must face in today’s world. For others the social message of the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church should have no relationship to the struggles we and so many endure today.

Yet the journey continues, each step of the way we are confronted with divisions, fear of others, and a spirit of “unwelcome” which still exist in church, nations and world, realities which are contrary to the Gospel, the Good News of Christ.

There are too many today who choose to believe in division, exclusion and separation.

Still we encounter the ugly sin of racism and the struggle we endure to “love our neighbor as ourselves.”

Our challenge, in response, is to wonder who and what we as Catholic Christians believe in. To whom do we listen? Whose Gospel do we follow, which story will we tell? How will we be different?

We are told to fear the stranger, the different and the new and thus keep the divisions alive. We too can sometimes be led to trust in such ways.

And yet, on our journey thus far this summer we have discovered in the Word of the Lord that it is the stranger and the outcast, who serves and breaks down barriers. We have heard that it is the journey forward which brings new life, *“and that life shall not be taken away!”*

And sometimes the stranger, the one left on the side of the road for dead, and the daring woman of today’s Gospel, become the icon of God, as those three were for Abraham and Sarah. It is often they who welcome us to a new home and a new vision. We have heard these words from Jesus: *“No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the Dwelling Place of God.”*

The “great tales” we have heard and told were not always words of comfort told in the realm of “make believe,” but

“wondrous stories of grace” which cut to the heart and the flesh and blood realities of the times in which we live.

In our hearing we have set our hand to the plow, making the ground ready for a new generation of healing, hospitality and life. We are fit for the dwelling place of God which is ever ancient and ever new.

It is the Gospel which is our guide, our hope, our way of living and acting. “It is Christ whom we proclaim, admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom.”

**“YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR
AS YOURSELF!”**



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