

“The Traveler”

The Threshold Moment stated, “The traveler is always an outsider, visiting new places and adjusting to customs and cultures outside their own experience.” **“Jesus warns the disciples that not everyone will welcome them on their journey. We too, may suffer rejection on our journey as Jesus’ followers.”** “Jesus wants us to make the most of the places we are welcomed and not worry so much about the places that turn us away.” **“It is the places of welcome where an outsider becomes an insider. Embrace them, find them and create them for others.”**

As the Pastor of Round Grove United Church, UCC, I have met a good number of travelers, who were in need. Many of the travelers I see are in need of some assistance – from information about locations of stores and of hospitals, or who to go to about some situation or more desperate needs – such as essentially being homeless, jobless, lost, or refugees, such as the victims of natural disasters. Usually, they need gasoline or a room for the evening or a meal or a bus ticket. **When a person is traveling and has very limited resources, it is easy to find oneself stuck in a location other than the intended one when the trip began.** There are no gasoline stations, which will give away free gasoline. I am unaware of any transportation companies, which will give away their service. So, when a traveler is unable to continue the journey because of lack of resources, some will find themselves suddenly homeless, hungry, and in great distress, much less able to reach their planned destination. Many such persons, who I have met as the Pastor, are traveling to go to or find a new job or maybe trying to reach a dying relative before their death or to attend a relative’s funeral. **We all feel bad for persons in such dire situations.**

Unfortunately, there are a large number of travelers, who have overcome tremendous hardships in their travel to their desired destination but have had their trips stopped by the Federal Government. The individuals I am referring to are victims of terrible conditions in the places from which they came. They fear for their lives. **I am talking about immigrants, who are asylum refugees.** In addition to finding the Federal Government has decided to dramatically slow down the process, they are also being told they must remain in another country where they face additional dangers, while they wait for their turn to be processed, if at all. Additionally, refugees in the Bahama’s, who are victims of Hurricane Dorian, are not being allowed to seek refuge in Florida, if they did not have the foresight to obtain a visa from the Federal Government prior to becoming victims. **The founders of this congregation – immigrants from Germany were indeed fortunate that they were not treated in such inhospitable fashions by the Federal Government over a hundred years ago.**

As part of our being a “**God Is Still Speaking**” congregation of the United Church of Christ, **we demonstrate God’s Way of Hospitality – welcome Everyone, including All Travelers!** We welcome guests, who are traveling through our community. We, also, welcome guests, who have traveled to the community and are either planning to be permanent residents or have an extend stay. In fact, some of our members, Carol and Dean Reyman, first came to us as folks, who lived part of the year with us and part of the year in South Dakota. **We are very happy to have recent Travelers become part of our Community of Believers!**

Further, Traveling Together is a good metaphor for our relationship with believers during our Journey of Faith and Life. Remember, Jesus told his Original Disciples how they were to relate to – treat one another in **John 13:34-35, “And now I give you a new commandment: agape love one another. As I have agape loved you, so you must agape love one another. If you have agape love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.”** Yes, we are to “agape love” one another during our Journey of Faith and Life – the New Life in Christ and the New Relationship with God.

In our Scripture, Jesus told a group of his followers, who he was sending out as travelers before him, about the importance of hospitality. He told them in **verses 5-9, “Whenever you go into a house, first say, ‘Peace be with this house.’ If someone who is peace-loving lives there, let your greeting of peace remain on that person; if not, take back your greeting of peace. Stay in that same house, eating and drinking whatever they offer you, for workers should be given their pay. Don’t move around from one house to another. Whenever**

you go into a town and are made welcome, eat what is set before you, heal the sick in that town, and say to the people there, 'The Kingdom of God has come near you.'" We are called to be like those "peace-loving" and hospitable hosts when we have Travelers visit us, so they will feel at home during their stay with us. When we travel with one another – with believers, we are not to make demands of one another or of others but, instead, to gratefully and humbly accept the hospitality, support, and sacrificial agape love we receive. We need to affirm to our hosts and hostesses, *"The Kingdom of God has come near you."*

I assume some, if not most of us, are a little disturb that Jesus told those seventy-two followers to curse those towns, which would not welcome them. To understand verses 12-15, it is helpful to examine where those verses came from. Those words are also found in **Matthew 11:20-24**. Matthew did not insert those verses between describing the sending out and the return of the 72 missionaries, as Luke did, but as an independent report about some towns rejecting Jesus. **When Matthew and Luke have sentences and phrases, which are not found in Mark, those sentences are generally understood by Biblical Academics to be from the Q Document.** The Q document is basically understood to have included a series of sayings and teachings attributed to Jesus. Those teachings were closely related to the discipline of members in parts of the Early Church. Many of the Q's reports portrayed Jesus as having been much more in line with Jewish Legalists than the rest of the Gospels.

All that being the case, in verses 12-15 of our Reading, it is clear those words were not part of Jesus' instructions to his 72 followers as they traveled ahead of him. If Jesus said them, then they belong in a different context.

Instead of belonging to the story in today's Reading, I believe Luke thought those verses would go well with the storyline in our Reading because Jesus was teaching his followers what they should do when they and their message were rejected.

However, Jesus did not focus on revenge and putting a curse on those, who rejected his followers and message. **Jesus said in verses 10-11, "But whenever you go into a town and are not welcomed, go out in the streets and say, 'Even the dust from your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. But remember that the Kingdom of God has come near you!'"** It was in the context of talking about what to do when the disciples and their message were welcomed that Jesus gave his very short instruction for what they should do when they are not welcomed. Their response was not to be casting a curse and calling for punishment, instead, it was to provide a clear and public sign they had been rejected – to publicly wipe the dust of the town from their feet, as well as, to remind the town's people the message of God's Kingdom embodied in Jesus had been offered to them.

How do we apply Jesus' instructions about being rejected in our Journey of Faith and Life? Instead of putting the focus on our hurt feelings, I believe we are called to remind those, who reject us and Jesus' Message that the Message is both very important and still available and True. We can do that by simply saying we understand they don't accept God's Invitation and Welcome, which Jesus embodied but we still hope for their sake they will one day Accept God's Invitation and Receive our Divine Parent's Welcome.

Getting back to the heart of our Scripture and Focus for today, Travelers frequently need Hospitality and Welcome! **Living out our emphasis of being a "God Is Still Speaking" church, we offer Hospitality to All People.** We declare and celebrate God's Forgiveness, Grace, Agape Love, Invitation to join in the New Relationship with God and All People, and our Divine Parent's Welcome into that New Relationship and the New Life in Jesus Christ – the Life of Citizens of God's Kingdom. **Let's continue to be a place of welcome** where an outsider becomes an insider. Let's embrace them, find them and create such a place for others. **Indeed, let us further invite them to join us as Travelers on the Journey of Faith and Life in Jesus Christ.** I am sure Jesus Christ, the Son of God, rejoices when we do that, as he did when the seventy-two returned. Amen.