

GRACE TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD AND FROM OUR SAVIOR WHO IS JESUS THE CHRIST.

Back in the day my family's home was an oasis for seminarians during internship year. The parade of vicars shows up in family slides of full day encampments on the beach, ice skating parties, and at the dinner table where they shared in our stretched and meagre meals on the cheap.

I wasn't sure how they all found their way there, but having seen how that works now, I know it was likely word of mouth from intern to intern: "if you need a landing pad, head to the Beckmann's." It was part of our lives in all my father's calls to day schools, so I think this hospitality must have been a thing for us.

The vicars brought joy to us in times of celebration. They were there with us at difficult moments, with gifts our family needed for life to go on. They have stories too, about the way being incorporated into our household helped that lonely year, while trying to get the hang of ministry in a difficult place and a tumultuous time in the 60's and early 70's when everything was changing and civil rights were being adjudicated on the march and in streets as well as the courts.

From time to time I'm still surprised when these strangers who became family for a season pop into my life when I least expect them! They never show up at my door, thank goodness! Mostly just over the internet. Because although I keep our guest room clean for any possible visitor, I can't say the rest of the house is ever company ready.

So I sympathize with Abraham and Sarah when three visitors just seem to materialize without warning and land at their desert oasis during the heat of the day while Abraham dozes on the tent-flapped porch under the oak trees. Maybe Abraham sensed their presence as he opened his eyes, and they shimmered a little, startling him awake.

He springs into action. He doesn't leave them cooling their heels on the porch, but hustles to wash their feet, offers morsels, brings out the cheese plate!, while mobilizing his household for a bona-fide feast. Then Abraham settles in with them to get to know them. They enjoy the refreshment of the oasis while the bbq smokes the tender calf.

Does Abraham see the wings in that shimmer? Does he know these strangers, these visitors, are the Lord clothed as the Lord's messengers? The same Lord who has been promising him the gift of life, a child, for years? Promising life in expanding circles of generations, a nation, descendents as numerous as stars and sands, sent as a blessing to all the world: angels and messengers of the Lord themselves?

Or is Abraham just welcoming *everyone* to the oasis as though he expects any arrival is bearing a powerful gift of life needed and longed for in the household. As though he anticipates that the Lord's image is in every arrival, treating each and all with attention to their needs, and mutually receiving the gifts of one-anothering.

Either way, Abraham and Sarah receive their blessing. There is still some waiting and trusting involved. There's a bit of laughing. There's an incredulous strangeness to God's ways. But God is making an opening for a sweeping blessing for the world, when it didn't seem a way through was possible, keeping God's promise in the gift of a child. The gift of life that ripples through time.

We meet that child and receive that gift of life today in Jesus. God's impossible possible. God in the flesh to save us and raise us up. But Jesus is on the loose. He's not in any one place, but all over the place, with good news that God's rule of love and life is near with the promise of life. Promising a morsel; then setting a feast. Casting out demons. Curing deep down the epidemic of dis-ease and sickness of fear, callous disregard, hopelessness, weariness in places he visits.

Jesus looks out over the crowds, over the peoples, over the streets. Jesus looks over spaces emptied and altered by covid and plywood, the marketplaces and offices, and even our church buildings. And he has compassion over us. For us.

Jesus sees you. Jesus sees us. He sees the utter exasperation we're feeling that's often just on the surface and sometimes even surprises us when it comes out. The way the waiting and the worry and grief wears and settles on us and dulls what joys can be found. The wear and tear of constant discrepancies in the barrage of news and messaging; the conflicting layers of leadership and sense sometimes there is no one at the helm as we pray for Jesus to take the wheel, and get us out of this.

Jesus sees the impacts of racism and inhumanity. Sees dis-ease and discomfort, anger, and feelings of helplessness and "how long O Lord" in coming to terms with the depth of the cure we need.

Jesus comes to us. He doesn't leave us orphaned, or resourceless.

I'm constantly amazed that ten years ago facing a time of covid we couldn't have dreamed of staying together like this: Being able to hear the Word, share together the life of Jesus' own body and blood, and make a joyful noise, as thin or strained as it sometimes feels to us, coming through fiber optics and bouncing off cell towers. This is still finally gift – a just-in-time miracle of gathering for worship. In the face of a global pandemic God makes a landing place, a way of blessing for us, here.

We may come here today feeling: enough is enough! But in the servant washing of our feet and the promise of a morsel, the long awaited Jesus, both guest and host, has prepared a feast of life for us in this oasis. We are blessed and leave feeling enough, is enough.

We see Jesus, coming to us, and the shimmer of the wings of the messengers of God with blessing for us in the faces of each person lighting up our gallery today to bear Jesus to one another and bring hope and joy! I'm renewed every time one of our phone callers tells us how blessed they are to be able to hear our voices! How every time someone struggles and finds their way thru the technological thicket to *this* oasis of refreshment in the weariness and isolation and can SEE everybody - there is laughter! Rejoicing! That this life, worship, is possible! Here!

Still and yet, for the challenges we face, Jesus sees we need a bigger boat. The power of the morsel multiplied into the feast of life. Even Jesus knows life needs to spread faster than disease. So he multiplies the deployment of *healers* exponentially. Just as the disciples are sent out of their already-itinerancy, we are sent out of our already-encampment on this cyber oasis. Jesus sends out the team of angel messengers.

Jesus sends us out somewhat defenselessly, vulnerable, traveling light with a gift to share, open and needing to receive the gifts of the kindness of the strangers we encounter with good news. Last week we talked about the permeable baptismal robes that leave us vulnerable to the sufferings of the world. And I was reminded that many of us are called in our work to put on all manner of Personal Protective Equipment, that still leave us open, vulnerable to human suffering, ills and dis-ease. We are reminded of the blessing of the mask, inviting us even as we put on our PPE as baptismal robes to go into the world each day with a mission, to preserve the blessing of life. We entertain angels unaware, in Christ's name, every day in the mission field we call our work and neighborhood.

We resolve together not to leave anyone in the human family cooling their heels waiting on the porch for shelter and food, equity, justice and dignity, any longer, but to recognize the image of our creator and receive blessing in the gifts they have to share that are gifts we desperately need. We engage that mutual hospitality as members of our congregation join the Poor People's Campaign march this week.

The same technology that brings us to this oasis of refreshment allows us to welcome others into this household of faith with a click of a "forward" button. And you are already here, from all over the country and Chicagoland, adding your gifts of prayer and praise. We can multiply these gifts exponentially, inviting others we know, all of us harassed and helpless, from all over the country, to come to the oasis, see the compassionate face of Jesus, receive healing and raising up in a perfectly life-preserving, socially distanced way.

The amazing gift is that in this time of national and global need for hope and healing, our mission field doesn't have to be limited to the Evanston area, but anyone we know who has a telephone. Forwarded from Constant Contact and Facebook to anyone we know feeling harassed and helpless. To everyone in need of a shepherd leader with power to save, heal, forgive, and turn us around. A God who sees us and our every need and supplies it creatively and abundantly with whatever is on hand.

You have something pretty fabulous to share here! A great spirit of life and hospitality!
Immanuel, God with us!

Do you know anyone who needs raising up? You've come to the right place. Jesus is near. Jesus is here. With love and life and hospitality for you and for all the boatload of friends you've brought with you to be angels and messengers to the world in turn. Let the church say Amen!

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