

6 Easter C - 9 May 2010
Acts 16:9-15; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14:23-29
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This is the fourth time I have presented a Youth Sunday sermon. Some of you may know this. Some of you may know also that this is the last time I can do so. I noticed in preparing for this sermon that I was busy with not only this task, but with many others. I am finding myself incredibly busy with school, with class work and with tests. And I am trying mentally to be ready to graduate and then to move off to some big changes in my life at college. And I am finding that the more I think about this, the more nervous I become; the scarier it seems to be.

I realize that I am about to move into a strange and unknown environment; unknown to me, anyway. A big part of this is that everyone I meet will be new to me, and I will be new to them. It is a very intimidating thought. What I am trying to remember is that, even in circumstances as scary as these, I will be given opportunities for my relationship with God.

In the first reading we hear this morning, the reading from the book of Acts, there is a woman named Lydia. She does not know the Apostle Paul, and Paul does not know her. Still, Lydia is listening to the stranger Paul as he teaches people about the Good News of God's Love in Jesus. And we hear that Lydia decides to be baptized as a person new to the faith. Then she says to Paul and his friends, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." I think this is interesting; because what Lydia does here is open herself to the judgment of Paul and of everyone else there. 'If you have judged me to be faithful to God....' And I think about what that might mean for her to say it.

People tell us who they are; and we also do the same: we tell people who we are. But the fact of the matter is it is often hard to determine if someone is the person whom they claim to be. It is not so

much that they can produce an identification card and prove that the name they tell us is the same name as on their driver's license. I am thinking more about the judgment that Lydia invites upon herself. Is she the faithful person that she claims to be? Is her character, are her priorities, are her values, what she claims them to be? I think about this when I think about having to meet people off at college. I ask myself how I will know who are the right people to hang out with? I can't know just by looking at someone if they are nice, or smart, or a Christian.

I can't tell this now; I won't be any more able to tell it when I go to college. I can only observe the behavior and actions of the people that I meet. A label that they offer or the label that I might try to give them just isn't enough to go by.

The woman in the reading from Acts, Lydia is inviting Paul to judge her character based on her actions of being baptized, maybe based on her act of inviting them over and feeding them lunch; maybe based on her generosity. In a way, she is aware that God has given to her a new opportunity to meet God again in Paul and his friends. In a way, she is giving them a new opportunity for them to meet God in her.

Last week, one of my fellow Sunday school students, Katie Rogers, mentioned a story. The title of the story is "Three Cups of Tea." Humanitarian, writer, and former mountaineer Greg Mortenson was attempting to climb K2; which is the second tallest mountain in the world. Mortenson and three other climbers have been on the mountain for 70 days. They are making their descent when Mortenson becomes separated from his fellow climbers. He becomes lost. And instead of ending up in the city he was supposed to, he comes across the small village of Korphe.

The people there very rarely, very very rarely, meet outsiders. Mortenson is very different from them. And he is wondering how they will respond to him. They will not know him. But, will they even care to know him? To them, he is a total stranger. And to him, they are total strangers, too. In the reading from Revelations, we hear that the children of God will have God's name on their foreheads.

Sometimes I think it would be easier if we could all see exactly that: a big sign on everyone's forehead. It would tell us, maybe in flashing lights, that this person is honest or trustworthy, or is not. But in life here and now, while there may be indicators and clues; there are no such obvious signs. So, it's a risk that we each take when we meet someone new. I think back to when my sisters and I first moved here. All of you were strangers to me and to us, and I found it pretty frightening. But I also remember how warm and welcoming each of you were.

Korphe, the village that mountain the climber Mortenson comes across, is a very secluded and remote village. However, even though the people are not used to having visitors, and even though there is a language barrier, still, they welcome him openly. They feed him and share tea with him. Mortenson is introduced to their way of life in depth. He is so touched by this village's hospitality and heartfelt welcome that after he gets home safely again, he decides to go back and he builds a much needed school for the children of the village of Korphe. The story gets its title from an old proverb that says, "The first time you share tea, you are a stranger. The second time you take tea, you are an honored guest. The third time you share a cup of tea, you become family..."

God knows who God's children are. Unlike us, God is able to know what is in people's hearts. Jesus says in the gospel for today, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with

them." God can always see the mark on our foreheads. And that's good, because God is God. God knows people better than anyone else can know them.

But for you and me, it is harder. We have to actually get to know people over time. And they have to take time to get to know us. The best sign of what is in our hearts is our actions, behavior, and example. I was baptized when I was a small child and then I was confirmed here a couple of years ago. I made that choice based on my values and principles. I was able to grow in Christ and to make that decision for myself because of the example behavior, and actions of my family.

Going off to school soon is a scary thing to think about. It is a scary thing to think about being a stranger in the midst of people who are all strangers to me. But then I remember that when my family and I came here almost ten years ago, that was a scary time, too. And then I remember that, in our own ways, over the years, we have all shared tea way three times, and many more times than that. Very quickly, we became family. In you, who were once strangers to me, I have had the opportunity to meet God again. And this, I have done.

This is the last time that I'll give a youth sermon here at ECR. But it won't be the last time that we see each other. And it won't be the last time that we meet God in one another. I have grown in the Christian faith because of your actions. Because of your behavior, your hospitality, your example, I have become closer to God. In meeting all of you, you who are still new to me and new to this family at ECR, I want you to know that I have met God in you. Because of each of you, I know that when I go away in the fall, I will have many opportunities to meet God again in people new to me, just like you once were. And I pray that they will meet something of you, and something of God, in me. Amen.