



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
9-23-12

- I. Writer Anne Lamott – Traveling Mercies, book Plan B written when raising her son. With an idealistic vision she begins a children’s Sunday School and she wants to welcome and include everyone, just as Jesus did. But after a few experiences of everyone’s quirks, she wonders, “What was Jesus thinking?”
- II. Kids are not easy – bullies, hyper, whiny, disruptive. Been in churches that would rather have children seen but not heard, or even not seen and not heard.
- III. But St. A’s is not like that. And Jesus was not like that. He put his arms around the ones with the least status, the least worth financially, socially, the ones who were vulnerable and needy. And he said quite directly, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”
- IV. That was radical talk – radical Jesus talk. And we in this church seek to reflect that radical teaching. Each month we stand and bravely sing, “All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.”
- V. It’s brave talk and brave talk can help create brave people. Because each of us might sing with our fingers secretly crossed saying to ourselves, ‘just so long as those people don’t make me uncomfortable.’ For to be honest with ourselves there are some people we’d really rather not have around.
- VI. Talked earlier about how privileged and perhaps cushioned we are to live here – but we do have our challenges in reflecting God’s love and grace – even if it is not in serving the invisible poor.
- VII. (Research this week on background checks and hearing, used to know everyone, now we can’t trust people, or I moved here to escape gangs, drugs, gay people, black people, poor people, liberal people, so on.)
- VIII. We open our doors to the homeless yet might not be sure of our reaction when one particularly dirty one wants to shake our hands and go out to eat with us.
- IX. Or I know of a church in Nebraska that divided over whether they should unlock their doors to offer safe sanctuary to illegal immigrants when the INS came in to town and raided the meat packing plant.
- X. And what happens when a worshipper is mentally ill and makes bizarre sounds during worship?
- XI. Or when someone of a different ethnicity or sexual persuasion wants to marry your child?
- XII. It’s radical talk and action to welcome everyone. For when we are asked to welcome someone who makes us uncomfortable it tends to expose our hidden prejudices and partialities and hypocrisy. James is spot on talking about the conflicts and disputes that are a war within ourselves. We know we are asked to love everyone, but like Anne Lamott, we ask, “what was Jesus thinking?”
- XIII. James writes to us about the qualities of wisdom – the example of a good life exhibiting the gentleness born of wisdom and the peace that is reflected in that life.
- XIV. Book Peace Pilgrim writes about the only way to work for peace is to first achieve inner peace and that comes only with deep self-examination, honesty, and spiritually growing up. She tells of her steps that included a time of preparation, purifications, relinquishments, and moving into a place of inner peace.
- XV. James speaks of it also as all of us wrestle with the situations and the people we would rather avoid – one of whom is our own self. And here is where the radical talk of Jesus can help us in our own journey to peace and acceptance, of our self and of others.

- XVI. The Bible never speaks of “beloved adults” of God. No, in the Bible all are beloved children of God. And all of God’s beloved children are welcomed into those open arms of Christ. All of God’s beloved children are welcomed into those open arms of Christ.
- XVII. That is you and I and everyone else. All are welcome in those arms.
- XVIII. Thanks be to God.