

*Based on Acts 2:42-47. The Apostles Practice Radical Hospitality*

We Choose Welcome, we say here at Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church. *Radical Hospitality*, we call it. Insisting that everyone and everything, and every part of ourselves, is included in the circle of God's love. Including you. Including me.

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church put it this way, in a posting that went viral on Facebook a few years ago:

*We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, gay, filthy rich, dirt poor, yo no habla ingles. We extend a special welcome to those who are crying new-borns, skinny as a rail or could afford to lose a few pounds.*

*We welcome you if you can sing like Andrea Bocelli or ... (and this is my favorite) ... like our pastor who can't carry a note in a bucket. You're welcome here if you're "just browsing," just woke up or just got out of jail. We don't care if you're more Catholic than the Pope or haven't been in church since little Joey's Baptism.*

*We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet, and to teenagers who are growing up too fast. We welcome soccer moms, NASCAR dads, starving artists, tree-huggers, latte-sippers, vegetarians, junk-food eaters. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems or you're down in the dumps or if you don't like "organized religion," we've been there, too.*

*If you blew all your offering money at the dog track, you're welcome here. We offer a special welcome to those who think the earth is flat, work too hard, don't work, can't spell, or because grandma is in town and wanted to go to church.*

*We welcome those who are inked, pierced, or both. We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down your throat as a kid or got lost in traffic and wound up here by mistake. We welcome tourists, seekers and doubters, bleeding hearts ... and you!*

No matter who you are or what you have done or what you have left undone or what you have had done to you, you are *welcome* here at SPC, we say. And not just because we say so but because Jesus says so, as do the apostles who take his teaching to the next level in our Lesson from Acts today.

It is Pentecost, after all. That great day in the cycle of the seasons when the people of God are gathered in from all parts of the known universe. We extend a special welcome, the early church says, to The Parthians, the Medes, the Elamites, we are told earlier in the chapter. We welcome you residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene. We extend a special welcome to visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs. If you are lost

and forsaken, rich and haughty, proud and strong, meek and the lowly, you are welcome here. All gathered in to the temple in Jerusalem, fifty days after the crucifixion of Jesus, to celebrate *barley*, of all things, at least in the first century Jewish form of the festival.

God has fed us for another year, they have shouted together in all their various languages. Alleluia, Amen! Then along comes a rush of wind and a Spirit of Radical Hospitality and lo and behold they come to understand one another - and the spirit that unites them all - in a deeper and even more powerful way.

Encouraged and equipped, the apostle Peter tells the people about Jesus, calling them to prepare for the very reign of God in their midst: a time beyond time and a place beyond place when pain and suffering and sin and oppression become no more. When we feast with our God in the fullness of grace, and we have finally learned how to live in peace. With God. With our neighbor. With ourselves.

Turns out that sounds pretty awesome to the people of Pentecost. The party goes on as one after the other after the other splash through the waters of baptismal grace and into a whole new way of living together: with all things in common; with feasting and fellowship; with a ripple effect that extends from the temple to the home to the streets. With a radical hospitality that truly does change the world.

The thing is, though, we know all of this only in hindsight. In hindsight we know that Jesus amasses a movement from the margins into the mainstream, calling the people to healing, wholeness, and hope. In hindsight we know the powers that be put him down while the power of God lifts him up. In hindsight we know the people who follow him through thick and thin pick up the mantle on Pentecost, make the movement their own, and then pass the torch of Radical Hospitality over and over and over again until it lands right here at our doorstep in Shepherdstown.

In the moment, however, the apostles have no idea what is that are actually doing, other than putting one foot in front of the other to keep going, open always to the guidance of a Spirit of Radical Hospitality that insists - as we do here at SPC - that imperfections and suffering are integral to the spiritual path. In the moment, they simply tell their truth of the welcome they have known in The Way and in The Spirit of Jesus and trust the rest to God.

We find ourselves in a similar moment too, as we mumble and fumble our way through this post-COVID, newly hybrid way of being church, with at least a third of our community still worshipping online, perhaps permanently. Our ministry of Radical Hospitality can no longer be primarily connected to this particular place and this particular hour on this particular day.

Now our welcome must shift from a moment in time to a way of life, a spiritual practice, if you will, a Walking Welcome that we carry with us through all times and places. Our welcome must be that compassionate gaze of curious wonder we offer every pilgrim we encounter on this journey in The Way and Spirit of Jesus, and the

reminder that we really are all in it together, beyond this witness of welcome in our worship, building up the Beloved Community as a provisional demonstration of the coming reign of God.

When we live out the mission of Radical Hospitality in this way, as a Walking Welcome wherever we go, my guess is that we cannot help, like the earliest apostles, but earn the goodwill of all the people and that day by day God will add to our number.